



# GREY SPRITE *THE* SILVER KNIGHT

FRANCIS E. PARK





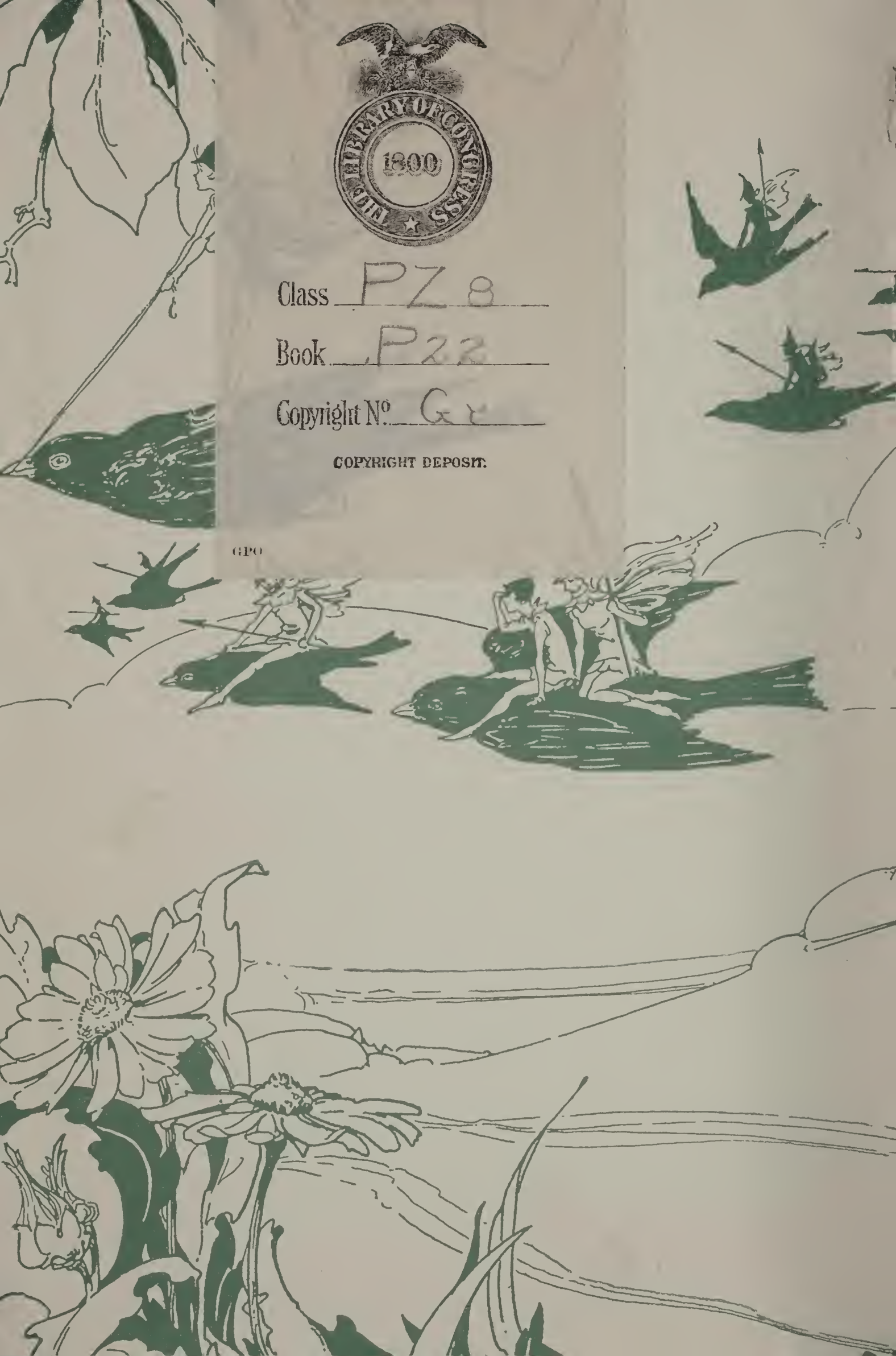
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GREY SPRITE, THE SILVER KNIGHT  
AND HIS ADVENTURES  
IN THE  
OLD, OLD FOREST









KNEELING AT HER FEET, PLACED THE JEWEL IN HIS QUEEN'S  
HAND. — *Page 96.*

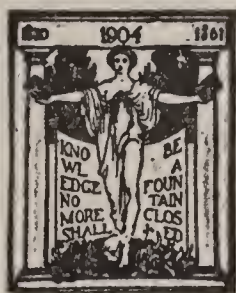


# GREY SPRITE, THE SILVER KNIGHT

HIS ADVENTURES  
IN THE  
OLD, OLD FOREST

BY  
FRANCIS E. PARK

ILLUSTRATED BY  
ELISABETH B. WARREN



BOSTON  
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

PZ 18  
PZ 2  
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GREY SPRITE, THE SILVER KNIGHT



PRINTED IN U. S. A.

Norwood Press  
BERWICK & SMITH CO.  
NORWOOD, MASS.

SEP 23 '26  
© CIA 950152

no 1



To  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER, PAL, COUNSELLOR, AND HERO

*On whose knee, as a little boy, I listened  
to more wonderful tales than I can ever  
hope to imagine, this little book is  
affectionately dedicated.*





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# GREY SPRITE, THE SILVER KNIGHT

His Adventures in  
the Old, Old Forest

## CHAPTER I

### THE WOODBINE AND THE OLD PINE

**T**HROUGH all the forest that bright June morning there swept a rustle of excitement. Wherever one might look, there was a fluttering of leaves and nodding and tossing of plumes as neighbors discussed the news that the South Wind had just brought. Never before in the history of Wildwood had such a thing happened, but let me tell

you all about it, and you can judge for yourselves.

Once in ten years it was the custom of the Fairy Queen to hold her court at Wildwood, and first she would listen to all grievances or troubles that any of the trees or flowers or any of the shy, gentle woodfolk might have, and with a touch of her magic wand bring instant relief. Then after that, there would be a grand ball on the level piece of green moss under the old pine, till the morning star came up in the East to warn all the night people that it was time to go to bed.

It was also her custom to do something nice for the special locality in which her court was held, and on this occasion the Lord High Chamberlain announced that Her Majesty was going to offer two prizes that would be decided in the autumn, and they were to be as follows: The two trees or bushes that could make themselves the most beautiful by that time were to be



changed into fairies and be joined forever to her Court.

Now you can easily imagine the excitement which rippled all over Wildwood as the news was spread the next morning by South Wind. Miss Maple flaunted her green leaves, and as she thought of the rich gold and crimson ribbons that Jack Frost had promised to bring her in the autumn she could already see herself dancing at the revels of the Fairy Court, and looked with pitying disdain on her neighbors, the Birch and Poplar girls.

The funny thing about it was that each one thought that he or she, as the case might be, would certainly get the prize, and all began at once to get ready.

Never before was there such prinking and preening of bark and leaves. The Birches hung themselves all over with yellow tassels, and with the soft, warm rain-water scrubbed their trunks till they were as white as snow. Then each leaf, as it

unfolded, was pressed and waxed, till it glistened in the sun like a mirror.

The young, green Pine-tree got out her balms and sweet-smelling pigments and went carefully over her frowzy head, culling out and throwing down upon the ground the dead, brown hairs, and combing and brushing the rest till they shimmered like green satin. Then as the Summer Wind would come straying along, she would coax him to blow upon her, and then would shake out all her boughs and fill the air around with the rich perfume that she used.

The Poplars went in for fancy effects, and hung their leaves so that the slightest breath would set them all a-quiver. One side they painted a beautiful shade of green, the other was like silver, and when the breeze swept through, they danced and glistened like a thousand sunbeams.

Even the Old Oak felt the thrill of expectancy. As he hurriedly pushed off the

dry dead leaves of the year before, he called to the wonderful little pink and grey fingers that were opening all over him to hurry up and spread out, for they would need much fixing and polishing before they would be ready for the fall inspection. Then he sent for an extra supply of acorns, and carefully trimmed every little branch with them.

Many of the smaller shrubs could hardly wait at all, and spent all their money for blossoms with which they decked themselves from head to toe. The Wild Rose made a picture that would certainly have taken a prize, but, alas, she got ready too soon, and long before the time for the Fairies to come, her decorations began to fade and get worn, and one by one they dropped off, till finally before the summer was half gone not a blossom was left, and only a very little money to buy a few red berries to trim her bare branches.

The Barberry was not quite so lavish



with her money, although she did nearly the same thing, for she bought a lot of yellow lace and draped her beautiful green branches with it in gay wreaths, yet when she found she had been hasty and that her elegant dress would be all tattered when autumn came she hunted around and found at a shop some branches of scarlet berries that shone even more magnificently than her yellow lace, and she confidently announced to her neighbor, Miss Walnut-tree, that she could not see how any judge of beauty could pass her by.

Now, in the midst of all this turmoil and bustle of excitement there were two to whom never a hope came of even getting into the contest. One was an old Pine-tree, the oldest in Wildwood, and nearly dead. All his life he had fathered the little, weak things about him. When the heavy snows of winter came, he would catch the burden of them in his strong arms, so that the puny weak saplings be-

neath his spreading branches would not be overwhelmed. The fierce lightning, darting down to destroy, was taken in his strong grasp and, although it blackened and burned, he never relaxed his hold until all of it had been safely carried into the moist earth. In his fragrant branches he had housed the nests of many birds and lulled the little ones to sleep with his crooning songs of olden times. For years, never thinking of self, he had given to those about him, but now he was old and useless, no one remembered him, no one loved him. Surely the hope for a beauty prize was not for him.

The other was a little trailing vine, slender, but not strong enough even to hold herself erect; there was no money in her purse to buy rich colors or beautiful blossoms with which to deck herself, yet she was always wishing she might be beautiful and gain one of the coveted prizes. The Maple-tree, looking down on her,

laughed in scorn. "What, you, you poor little crawling thing! Do you ever hope to be beautiful? What impudence!" and she rustled her leaves in mocking laughter till the little brown rabbits asleep in the thicket peeped out to see what was the matter. No answer could the poor little vine make; she could only sob, until it seemed as if her heart would break.

Now it chanced that she was growing at the foot of the scraggly Pine, with its scarred and blackened trunk, and hearing her grieving, he asked in a kindly voice what the trouble was. "Alas!" said she, "I must always lie hidden on the ground, and no one can see me. I am sure that if I were only up in the air so that my leaves could expand, I would stand some chance for a prize. I am so tired of always being looked down upon, and trodden under foot." The old Pine shook his head sympathetically and said, "Why not use me

for a support? To be sure, I am old and homely and not of much use, but you are welcome to all the help I can give."

So day by day, the little vine crept higher and ever higher on the old scraggly trunk, clasping her fingers into the gnarled, rough bark; and as her delicate head rose up into the beautiful sunlight, she was filled with a great love and pity for the poor old tree, and one day a grand idea came to her. From that time on, she worked steadily for that one thing. Said she to herself, "Who am I to receive a prize? But here is this dear old tree, the only friend who has ever held out a helping hand to me. He has spent his life in service for others, and even now, when nearly dead, has taken pity on me and raised me up so that I may have a chance. No one will ever notice my slender root. I will put all my thoughts on decorating him. I will weave beautiful designs with



my long stems and glossy leaves all over his trunk, and who knows but he may win a prize and be happy ever after?"

Slowly the long, hot summer wore away, and as it drew to a close, there would come every now and then a cool night, warning the contestants that autumn was at hand, and at last the eventful time arrived.

Never in the memory of the oldest inhabitant had such a night been seen. The air was balmy and mild, spiced with all the rich perfumes the contestants had been using in their preparations. Not a cloud obscured the sky, and the stars glowed like great lamps. Long before the time for the Queen to arrive, crowds of wood-folk began to assemble, and, to judge from the different opinions expressed, the members of the Committee were going to have a hard time to decide the question. The old grey squirrel, for instance, was sure that the Walnut-tree

with its rich dress of dull russet should have it, and could see no great beauty in any of the others, but all the time he was cracking a nut that the Walnut-tree had given him, so that his judgment could hardly be called unbiased. And so it went.

But at last the arguments and whispering came to a sudden stop as the shrill voice of a Katy-did, who was master of ceremonies, was heard:

“Light your lamps, light your lamps!” and instantly the whole glade became bright as day, only with a much more mellow light, when a million fireflies switched on their tiny lamps. And as the wonderful light flooded the whole woodland, an orchestra composed of all the crickets in the fields broke forth into a triumphal march, and down and out of the starry night came floating great, furry moths, and on their backs sat the Fairies. And then, when all had taken their places,

there came a big, white moth with pale-green wings banded with lovely pink, and on its back sat the most beautiful creature in all the world—the Fairy Queen. After she had been conducted to her throne, the Lord High Chamberlain took his stand on the moss in front of her, and with a clear voice, that was heard all through Wildwood, rehearsed first the conditions governing the prizes, and then appointed the Committee who should inspect the contestants and decide the question.

There had been many changes in the appearance of all the trees during the months of their preparation. Most of them had added bright colors, but those who had spent so much on blossoms and gay trimmings early in the summer looked very shabby now. There were three that the Committee finally settled down to decide between: the Pine, glossy in its fragrant, green needles; the Oak, rich with dull crimson and green; and the Maple, flam-





OUT OF THE STARRY NIGHT CAME FLOATING GREAT, FURRY  
MOTHS. — *Page 21.*





ing from top to toe in gold and scarlet. For a long time they argued, but before the question was decided, there came a cry from a little distance away. It was from one of the Courtiers who had wandered apart from the others.

“See, here is one worth looking at!” he cried, and while they crowded round, a loud cry of admiration ran from mouth to mouth, as they gazed upon the old tree draped with the greatest skill by its loving little friend, whose leaves and thread-like stem had blushed so deeply at the admiration they had excited that they had changed in an instant to a most beautiful crimson.

The whole Court came to gaze. “Which one deserves the prize?” they cried. “Give it to the little vine,” said the old tree, “she has done it all.” “Not so,” she replied, “I could do nothing by myself. This dear old friend has raised me up from the ground and helped me just as

he has been helping every one else all these years. He, not I, deserves it."

The Committee stood puzzled for a moment, when the Queen spoke up,

"There are two prizes," said she, "let them each receive one," and waving her magic wand, she touched each of them lightly, and lo, in place of the little vine stood a lovely sprite in a green gown, and where the old tree had stood, there was now a merry, little Courtier in a grey suit, embroidered with a crimson vine, never any more to grow old. All the plants of the wood save the Maple and the Oak and the young Pine cheered and danced, till there shone in the East the Morning Star. And then, presto! they were gone.

## CHAPTER II

### GREY SPRITE'S QUEST FOR THE ANCIENT JEWEL

#### *Part I*

**G**LOOM and despair had settled over Fairy-Land. Gone was the tinkle of bells on flying feet, and hushed the silvery laughter and the fluting of song. Everywhere, in small groups, the Fairies could be seen discussing the situation in hushed and awe-stricken tones, for their Queen was actually wearing herself out with grief and hopeless longing for the one thing in the world she could not get—the Ancient Jewel, which distant tradition had revealed—the jewel that shone with the light of the stars and was shot through and

through with the shimmering gleams of the rainbow, and most wonderful of all, before whose mystic light all truth stood naked and revealed.

Time and time again, bold Fairies, fired with resolution and enthusiasm, had kissed the hand of their Queen, and, vowing that they would return with the object of her desire, had departed on their quest, never to be heard from again; and none could say where it was to be found. Only the old tradition, old as the race, proclaimed its existence, and the Queen had set her heart upon it, and would not be comforted.

“Oh, Grey Sprite, is there anything we can do?” cried little Woodbine, the tears streaming down her pretty cheeks. Ever since the night when she, the clinging little vine, and he, the faithful, generous Old Pine, had won the beauty prize, and had been transformed forever into Fairies of the Queen’s own court, she had been



the Queen's favorite attendant, and never was a mistress served with more devotion. Now as she watched the Queen's despair and grief, it seemed as though her little heart must break, and she had stolen away for a few minutes to pour out her troubles to her old friend.

Grey Sprite listened in silence, but into his mind sprang a sudden decision and a great resolve. Might it not be that he, of different origin from that of the other Fairies, and of a more intimate kinship with Nature, could succeed where they had failed, and find the wondrous Jewel?

Instantly his resolution was taken. "Woodbine," said he, "I am going to try to find it, and something tells me I shall succeed. Go back and comfort the Queen. Tell her to look forward confidently to my coming."

A moment more and he was gone, and Woodbine hastened away to her mistress, bearing with her a hope which already



was melting the cold chill of fear that overwhelmed her heart at Grey Sprite's word, for she could not forget all those who had tried before—and had never come back.

High over the trees that night floated a great brown moth, and on the soft fur between the broad wings sat Grey Sprite with brooding eyes. Although he had acted upon a sudden impulse, he was resolved that never would he give up the search until the Ancient Jewel was found. But where was he to look? Clearly he must have advice, and of all the wood-folk with whom he was acquainted, Firefly would be most likely to know something of value, for he was continually on the go, flashing his search-light this way and that. Most certainly he would talk with him first.

Softly Grey Sprite and Brown Moth dropped to earth and, as a sudden flash of pale-green light illumined the darkness,

Grey Sprite called out, "Oh, Firefly! Come and talk with me a minute, will you?" Quickly a light shone full in their faces as Firefly flitted up to satisfy his curiosity.

"Well! Who are you?" asked Firefly.

"What! Do you not recognize your friend, the Old Pine, whom the Fairy Queen changed into one of her Little People?" asked Grey Sprite.

Many had been the time in the old days when Firefly had sheltered himself from cold and storm in Old Pine's rough bark, and he was very glad to meet him again.

"Tell me," said Grey Sprite, "do you know anything about the Ancient Jewel, and where it can be found?"

"No," replied Firefly, "I never heard of it; but perhaps Whip-poor-will may have, for he has suffered a great grief, and I think he is very wise."

"Where can I find him?" said Grey Sprite.

“I will come with you and help,” said Firefly, “for it is difficult to locate him by his voice alone, which is very deceptive. But he has big, black eyes, and when I shine my light upon them, they glow like little balls of fire.”

So he settled himself beside Grey Sprite, and with swift, steady flight, Brown Moth floated away towards the deep woods. Soon in the distance was heard a plaintive cry which seemed to come from every direction at once. “Whip-poor-will, Whip-poor-will.”

“Now,” said Firefly, “look for his eyes,” and as they sped along, he flashed his light this way and that, when suddenly right before them shone two, little, glowing balls, and Firefly called out, “We are friends, Whip-poor-will, and have come to ask your advice.”

“Speak quickly, then,” said the bird, “for I have a mission that I cannot neglect,” and opening his wide mouth, he

made all the echoes of the night ring with his weird plaint. In a few hasty words, Grey Sprite explained his visit, and asked him if he could help.

“Jewel!” said Whip-poor-will. “I know a place that is full of them, and it is probably there. At the third turn of the Winding River lies a deep meadow. Often when the moon was bright have I seen the Jewels shining there. Now I beg that you will leave me to my grief,” and again his sad cry filled all the night.

Grey Sprite’s heart beat with rapture as he thought how speedily his adventure would be ended, and saying good-by to Firefly, he gave the direction to Brown Moth and lost himself in the delight of picturing the joy of the Fairy Queen when, bending low, he would place in her hands the wondrous Jewel. And how Woodbine’s eyes would shine!

Soon they saw in the distance a twisting thread of silver, the Winding River, and



at the third turn, Brown Moth floated down to the deep meadow. Sure enough! Sparkling like diamonds there were thousands of flashing dots, and Grey Sprite began to wonder how he could ever select from among so many the special Jewel that he was seeking. Alighting on a bush that shone more than the others, he reached out to touch one of the gleaming gems, when lo! it vanished, leaving only a wet spot on his hand. The Jewels of the Whip-poor-will were but dewdrops glistening in the moonlight.

## *Part II*

For a few moments Grey Sprite stood spellbound, as a full realization of his disappointment surged over him. All his wonderful dream of success was shattered and gone. But his courage was too high to be checked by failure, and he began to realize that the road leading to his goal



was going to be neither easy nor straight. To whom should he turn now? It was useless to expect any further help from Firefly or Whip-poor-will. To whom should he turn? Who? Who?

Just at that moment, as though in answer to his unspoken thought, there rang over the hills and through the woods a loud, "Who-who"; and he cried out, "Great Owl! Perhaps he knows! Quick, Brown Moth, up to the top of that tall dead tree."

Scarcely had they reached it, when out of the moonlight, noiselessly as a snowflake, glided a large, dark bird with glowing eyes, and perched beside them. Brown Moth had alighted in a shadowed spot, and his color was so nearly that of the limb that Great Owl, who was eagerly scanning the ground below watching for his supper, did not see him.

"How goes the hunting, Great Owl?" cried Grey Sprite, and the big bird was so startled that he nearly lost his balance.

“Who are you that call me?” said he.

“Ha, ha,” laughed Grey Sprite. “We never needed an introduction in the old times when you would spend the day sleeping safely amongst my thick branches before I went to live with the Fairies.”

Great Owl opened his big eyes wider than ever.

“Old Pine,” he cried, “is it really you? And what in the world are you doing up here in the top of this tree?”

“I came up to see you,” said Grey Sprite, and he told him the whole story from beginning to end. Great Owl listened with such attention that he never even saw a plump little rabbit hopping across the patch of moonlight ground at the foot of the tree.

“Now,” said Grey Sprite when he had finished, “I need help badly. What can you do for me?”

“Jewel!” murmured Great Owl to him-

self. "It seems to me that I have heard something about it somewhere. When was it?" and ruffling up all his feathers until he looked twice as big as before, he closed his eyes, and for a short time sat lost in thought. Then all the feathers smoothed themselves again, and he opened his eyes with a snap. "I have it!" he cried. "I remember a long time ago catching a big, fat field mouse, and just as I was about to eat him, he squeaked out that if I would spare him, he would tell me a secret that would make me rich for life. As I wasn't very hungry, I consented, and he told me of a place—I can't just remember where, but I am sure it was on Black Mountain—where there was a wonderful jewel. I remember I flew into a rage, for of what use was a jewel to me? But I had given my word, so I let him go. I never even took the trouble to hunt for it, and now I have forgotten just where he told me to go.

However, if you can find Field Mouse and can get him to tell you, I think your question is answered."

"Oh, how fortunate I was to meet you!" cried Grey Sprite. "I shall never forget; and you know I am in a position to do more for my friends than formerly. Just think up some nice wish for yourself, and when I get back with the Jewel, I will see that it comes true. Now, Brown Moth, we must find Field Mouse without delay," and waving farewell to Great Owl, they floated down towards Earth again, while far and wide the echoes repeated Great Owl's ceaseless question, "Who—who?"

Far away in a meadow, Brown Moth settled beside a pile of grey stones, and listening intently, the pair watched and waited for Field Mouse. Once they saw a large shadowy form with a big tail slinking across the field, and they knew that some one else was looking for him also. Pretty soon they heard a squeak, and in-



stantly Grey Sprite called out, "Oh, Field Mouse, I am a Fairy from the Queen's Court and wish to talk with you, but be very careful how you show yourself, for Red Fox is sneaking close by." Presently they saw a little nose sniffing at them from the shelter of the rock pile.

"Well, what do you want of me?" said Field Mouse, and there was a shade of suspicion in his tone.

"I have been told that you know something about the Ancient Jewel, and I am searching for it," said Grey Sprite.

"All right," said Field Mouse in an insolent tone, "go right on hunting for it; no one is stopping you."

"That is not a very courteous answer," said Grey Sprite. "I wonder how Great Owl will feel when I tell him what you say. I think he will sup on scrambled mouse before very long. It was he who sent me to you."

At the mention of Great Owl, a very

rapid change came over Field Mouse, and in a voice trembling with fear, he cried, "Oh, I was only having my little joke, I did not mean any harm. Please tell me how I can serve you."

Grey Sprite, speaking very softly so as not to attract Red Fox's attention, as he was still prowling near by, told him about his quest and the urgent need of haste. A promise was also made to Field Mouse that he should be richly rewarded, if he helped Grey Sprite attain his desire.

The mention of Great Owl's name seemed to encourage Field Mouse's willingness to help, even more than the idea of the reward, for he had never forgotten that night when a black shadow had passed over him and the next thing he knew he was going swiftly through the air up into the top of a tall tree. Oh, that terrible beak and those frightful claws! How he had ever kept his senses long enough to bargain for his life he never knew, and

even to this day the bare mention of his captor's name, or even a sudden shadow passing over, would set him trembling like a leaf. So he eagerly described the spot at the foot of the great precipice on Black Mountain where a jewel lay, and it was so beautiful that he felt sure it was the one they wanted. He said that on the outside it was just like a piece of rough, round stone, but when you turned it over, the inside was one great jewel. He had seen it with his own eyes, but he did not dare to go there again. So, very carefully he gave the directions for finding it, and after getting Grey Sprite's promise to speak a good word for him to Great Owl, and, oh, yes! not to forget the reward, he bade them good-by and good luck.

Once more up into the night air floated the big moth, heading straight for the precipice that showed in the moonlight like a great white scar on the side of Black Mountain.

At the foot of it they alighted, and Grey Sprite, looking this way and that, soon found the starting point of their search: an old rotten stump, where Field Mouse had formerly lived. "Now," said he, "we follow the old rabbit-path towards the east until we come to the big ant-hill." Thence they turned sharply to the left to pause again at the foot of "the scraggly, old cedar-tree." They were very near it now. Only one more step in the chain of directions, and they would behold the wondrous Jewel for which so many had searched, and so far in vain. Suppose it had been found and carried away by some one who did not know its value! At the thought, Grey Sprite broke into a run. Yes, there was the "funny square stone with the white blotches all over it," and Joy! Joy! a flash of dazzling, red light shone into his eyes for a second, as throwing himself upon his knees he seized the sparkling treasure, only to hurl it upon the ground



again. For this was not the Ancient Jewel! Beautiful and bright it was, and to simple Field Mouse had seemed a wondrous and priceless thing, but Grey Sprite knew that these flashing stones were only crystals of quartz, and that he was no nearer to his journey's end than when he stood gazing at the dewdrops of Whip-poor-will.

### *Part III*

"Master, the day is coming." Grey Sprite turned at the words, and Brown Moth pointed to the faint touch of rose in the eastern sky. He had worked all night, and was hungry and sleepy. Grey Sprite considered a minute. There was no telling how far he might have to travel. The moth could fly only by night, and was not very fast at that.

"Brown Moth," said he, "I can see that from now on I must work mostly by day,

and your delicate eyes cannot stand the bright sunlight. I think you had better get a good meal and some sleep, and to-night fly back to the Court again. Tell Woodbine that 'all is well,' and that when she sees me next, I shall have the Jewel. When I come back, I shall not forget your friendly aid. As soon as morning comes, I am going to consult the ants."

As he watched the great moth vanish into the night, a feeling of loneliness stole over him, and his thoughts strayed back to Woodbine. He wondered when he should ever see her again.

Slowly the rosy light deepened and brightened in the east. Dim, shadowy forms began to stand out from the gloom that was everywhere. Presently a chirp was heard from a neighboring tree, and answered quickly from another near by, the sleepy opening of the bird chorus that was soon in full voice throughout the forest. The rose in the east changed to

flaming crimson and then to gold, as over the rim of the world peeped the great sun. The day had come.

As soon as he saw the ants stirring, Grey Sprite stationed himself at one of the entrances of the hill and was immediately surrounded by a company of the red soldiers who guarded the portal. "I am from the Fairy Queen's Court," he cried, "and I wish to speak with your Queen."

At his words, one of the soldiers bustled away and soon returned with a large, black ant. Saluting smartly, he stepped back into the ranks, and the newcomer said: "I am the Governor of this City. May I inquire who you are, and what you want?"

"My name is Grey Sprite, and I am a member of the Fairy Queen's Court," answered our hero. "I am seeking the Ancient Jewel, and have come to ask your Queen if she knows where it may be found."

“Come with me,” said the Governor, “and I will take you to her. I have never heard of it, but if there is such a thing, she will know something about it.”

Entering by the narrow passage-way where he had stationed himself, they soon passed into a wider road, and Grey Sprite was amazed at the great crowds of ants he saw streaming out from galleries that tunneled the hill in every direction. Although all was bustle and hurry, yet there was no confusion. Each one seemed to know just what he was to do, and was going ahead to accomplish it, paying no attention to anything else. Most of the ants that he passed were of the same color as the red soldiers at the entrance, but he saw also many black ants that looked like his conductor, and they were busily engaged in tending the hatching eggs, and caring for the young ones.

Presently Grey Sprite and the Governor came to a very large hall, at the center of



the hill. This was crowded with ants of all degrees and stations, coming and going in a steady stream, and in the center, surrounded by her councilors, reposed the Queen Ant, busy with her duties. At sight of the Governor with a stranger, a sudden hush fell over all, and the guards drew closer about their mistress as though to protect her.

“An Ambassador from the Court of the Fairy Queen wishes to consult you about the Ancient Jewel, Your Majesty,” said the Governor.

“He is welcome,” replied the Queen. “Present him.”

Taking the Fairy by the hand, the Governor led him forward, and bending low, Grey Sprite thanked her for her gracious words, and then told her of the terrible calamity that threatened the world. All joy and happiness were endangered, for the Great Queen was pining away with desire for the Ancient Jewel, and he had

sworn to find it for her or perish in the attempt. Did she by any chance know where it might be found?

“The Ancient Jewel?” exclaimed the Queen. “It is a long time since I have even heard it mentioned. I am sorry, but I do not know myself where to look for it. I have always understood that it was impossible for any one to find it or even look upon it. I remember once hearing one of the workers tell of a conversation he had had with Red Lizard who lives under the rotten log in the deep wood. I think the subject was mentioned, and I would advise you to seek him and find out what he really knows about it. It may be of value.” With that she dismissed him, and told the Governor to reconduct him to the outside world.

Hope rose strong within his heart again, for Grey Sprite felt sure that this time he was upon a real trail. But how to reach Red Lizard? Just then he heard

a loud, buzzing sound, and looking up saw a little brown bird poised over a blossom with wings moving so swiftly the eye could not follow them.

“Humming-Bird, Humming-Bird,” he cried, “come here. I have as great need of you as formerly you had of me when you saddled your little nest on my branches, and I kept the rain and sun from your babies. I am Old Pine, who was changed by the Fairy Queen.”

“If you have need of me and I can help you, Old Friend,” said Humming-Bird, “you can surely count on me, for I do not forget what I owe.”

So Grey Sprite told him about finding Red Lizard; and Humming-Bird said, “Climb right up on my back and clasp your arms tightly about my neck, for my feathers are very smooth, and we will go swiftly.”

It seemed scarcely more than a minute to Grey Sprite before they were circling

about a huge old log that lay slowly dropping to pieces there in the deep forest, and after they had alighted, Grey Sprite walked around it, looking for some chance to get under. At length he saw a hole that seemed to go in the direction he wished, but it looked very dark and gloomy. No telling what hideous thing might be lurking there in the dark.

“Pretty risky, I should say,” remarked Humming-Bird. “I like to stay where I can use my wings.”

“Well, there is only one thing to do,” said Grey Sprite. “Red Lizard is under there somewhere, and I have got to talk with him. But if I never come out again, please find some way to let my Queen know that I tried to the last.”

Entering the hole, he was soon lost to sight. It was as dark as pitch, and everything he touched was wet and slimy. He could hear strange noises, and once he was sure that something moved quickly,



and he held his breath in fear that it would seize and devour him there in the dark. Nothing happened, however, and he pushed carefully on towards the center of the log. Finally he ventured to call, "Red Lizard! Red Lizard!"

No answer for a moment, and then a whisper: "Who calls Red Lizard?"

"A friend of the Queen of the Ants," Grey Sprite answered. (He thought it best not to tell that he was a Fairy, for he could not know what enemies might be listening there in the dark.) "I am seeking information about the Ancient Jewel, and she told me that you were wiser than the other creatures in the woods and might be able to tell me where to find it."

Red Lizard was very much pleased at this mention of his knowledge. "Well, I have been about some," he said, "and picked up quite a bit of wisdom. Let me see, I was visiting my cousin, Spotted Eft, in the big swamp, and I was telling him

how handsome his new, blue suit was, and how bright his yellow spots, when a hoarse voice rasped out, 'Bright? There's only one bright thing in the world,' and turning round we saw Old Turtle. (You know he has lived so long that he knows almost everything.) 'And what is that?' we cried. 'The Ancient Jewel,' said he, but before he could say any more, a flock of ducks went swimming by overhead, and he tore off after them in hot pursuit. He never came back to tell us any more, so that is all I know about it; but I should think by the way he spoke that he may know all about it. By the way, would you mind telling me how you got in here? Brown Adder lives in that hole you came through, and he would eat you up at sight."

At this fearful piece of news, poor Grey Sprite grew pale with fright. There are only a few things in the world that can

hurt a Fairy, and alas! Brown Adder was one of them.

“He must have been out,” said Red Lizard, “but I very much fear you will run into him on your way back. However, perhaps he will still be away and you will get along all right. Good luck to you, and I hope you find the Jewel.”

Back through the dark, slimy hole crept Grey Sprite, pausing every few steps to listen. At last he could see the light of the entrance, and by it he made out another path branching off from the one he was on. A sudden impulse led him to explore it, and he soon found that it came out quite near to the first one. But, O horrors! there was Brown Adder all coiled up, and he seemed to be watching something. Grey Sprite could see his red-and-black tongue playing back and forth from his mouth. Thinking that while his attention was distracted he might

make his escape, he was on the point of stealing back to the other entrance, when the snake moved a little, and the Fairy saw poor little Humming-Bird on the ground staring up at the great ogre, who, with his glittering eyes fastened upon him, seemed to have fascinated him. At sight of his friend's peril, all fear left Grey Sprite. Like a flash, his plan of action was formed.

“Old Coward! Old Dirty Brown Adder! I am Grey Sprite of the Fairies. Come in here and fight me. I am going to kill you and hang your speckled skin on the bushes for every one to make fun of,” and reaching out, he gave the snake a hard kick, and then turning, ran back towards the other entrance as fast as his legs could carry him. Brown Adder flew into a terrible rage, whisked about to protect himself, and then glided swiftly into the hole to punish the insolent Fairy, but as he went in at one entrance, Grey Sprite



came tearing out of the other, and flinging himself on Humming-Bird's back, the two were out of danger in a jiffy.

To this day, I don't suppose Brown Adder knows what it was that cheated him out of a nice little Humming-Bird for his breakfast.

Later in the afternoon he called to Red Lizard and asked him what he thought about it, but the latter, remembering how kind and polite his visitor had been, and how deeply impressed he was with his knowledge, only replied, "I wonder!"

#### *Part IV*

A week had passed in ceaseless search for the swamp where Old Turtle lived. In the excitement about Brown Adder, Grey Sprite had never thought to ask the way to it, and it was out of the question to go back to inquire, except as a last resort. Swamp after swamp they visited, asking

anxiously of all they met for news of Old Turtle.

Once, as they flew over a little pond dotted thickly with reedy islands, they saw a flock of Wood-Ducks at play, and Humming-Bird said, "I am going to ask them."

"Beautiful birds," he called, as he circled over them, "can you by any chance tell me where the swamp lies in which Old Turtle lives?" At the words, the ducks stopped their play, and the leader answered, "Yes, if it will bring him any trouble; otherwise we will not tell."

"It will bring a great happiness to us," cried Grey Sprite, "for he knows where something we are searching for is hidden. Please tell us how to reach him."

The ducks gathered in a circle and consulted a moment, and then the leader said, "We will tell you, but I must warn you to look out for him, for he is a terrible villain, and will eat you up if he gets a

chance. Only a few days ago we were resting in the swamp where he lives, doing no harm to any one, when suddenly one of our dear playmates gave a scream and instantly disappeared beneath the water. We all dove down to see what was the matter, and there was that wicked old turtle swimming for the bottom, with our friend in his terrible mouth. We were so frightened, we never stopped flying until we reached this pond. He eats everything he can catch, and I don't think you can get him to tell you anything. However, you can try if you wish," and Wood-Duck gave them careful directions how to reach the swamp where Old Turtle lived.

"Hurrah," cried Grey Sprite, "we are getting on at last."

Hours later, they alighted on a bush growing out of the great swamp for which they had sought so long. The air was vocal with the sweet calls of the nesting

blackbirds, and fragrant with the smell of the button-bushes that were everywhere in full blossom. "What a pleasant place," cried Humming-Bird. "You wait here on this bough while I get a bite to eat," and darting away he was soon sipping the nectar from the sweet blossoms.

As Grey Sprite sat looking about with interest at the stirring life of the swamp, he saw below him in the water a school of little fish swimming slowly along, and calling to them, he asked if they knew where Old Turtle lived, and if they could carry a message to him. At his call the fish swam towards him, but the moment they realized what he wanted, they dashed away as if in the greatest fright.

"That's funny," he said.

"What's funny?" asked a voice above him, and looking up, he saw a blackbird sitting there, looking curiously at him.

"Why I just asked those fish if they would take a message to Old Turtle for



me, and they swam away as though frightened out of their senses."

"You must be a stranger around here," returned Blackbird, "or you would have known better than try to get any one to take a message to him. We call him Death in this swamp, and no one goes any nearer to him than he can help. What did you want to see him about?"

As he seemed to be a friendly bird, Grey Sprite told him about his search, and when Blackbird had learned of its serious nature, he became deeply concerned. "I don't know how you will ever get anything out of him," he said anxiously. "He never did a good turn in his life, and there are only two things in all the world he cares for: eating, and sleeping in the sun."

"Thank you for those words," cried Grey Sprite. "You have given me a good plan, and I think I can make it work. You know bullies are always cowards at heart."

“Well, you have the best wishes of every one in the swamp,” returned Blackbird, and off he flew to spread the news that Old Turtle had visitors, and it looked as though there was going to be some fun.

When Humming-Bird returned a little later, Grey Sprite had his plans well thought out. “Fly over to the beach,” he said, pointing to a graveled bit of shore that lay close by, and arriving there, he filled his pockets with the roughest stones he could find. “Now let us find our friend,” he said grimly.

The first blackbird they met directed them to a large, flat stone lying just out of the water near the center of the swamp. “There he is sunning himself,” he told them. “That has been his rock for years and years, and woe betide anything that he finds on it. If you are really going to talk with him, keep well out of reach, for he can shoot out that old neck of his a good foot.”

Dozing peacefully in the warm sunshine, Old Turtle was dreaming about his other favorite pastime, and had just got to the point where he had caught a fat young muskrat, but before he had time to swallow him, he was rudely awakened by a voice near by, saying, "Greetings, Old Turtle," and opening his eyes in astonishment, he saw, to his intense surprise, beautiful Humming-Bird perched on his rock, just out of reach, and strangest of all, upon his back a little grey Fairy, with a delicate red vine embroidered all over his jacket.

Before he could collect his senses, the Fairy continued. "Excuse me, please, for waking you, but I am on a mission that cannot wait. I have been told that you know where the Ancient Jewel is to be found, and I will reward you handsomely if you will tell me where to find it."

Now the cunning Old Turtle had not the least intention in the world of telling

anything he knew, but he thought by delaying a bit, he could get near enough to make a sudden snap, and gobble them up; to be sure they would not taste as good as the young muskrat he had been dreaming about, but they would make a change in his diet, and it was seldom that he had a chance to get such a juicy little morsel. So he drawled, “ ‘Ancient Jewel,’ oho! you want to find that, do you?” and laughed till his sides shook. At the same time, he edged just a tiny bit nearer.

“Hang on tight,” whispered Hummingbird.

“How much of a reward will you give me?” asked Old Turtle, and he tried to look pleasant.

“What would you like?” countered Grey Sprite, as he tightened his hold around Humming-Bird’s neck.

“Well,” said the old murderer, “I should want a half dozen fat young ducks for my breakfast every morning, and——”



“Hold tight,” cried Humming-Bird as he shot into the air, and the next second, Old Turtle’s wicked head just grazed him, as he stretched to his full lunge.

“Steady, Humming-Bird; leave the talking to me,” said Grey Sprite, “light again just out of reach. What else were you going to say you wanted?” asked he, as quietly as though nothing had happened.

Old Turtle was too much astonished to answer; in fact, he couldn’t think of anything else on the spur of the moment but gathered himself together and made another savage lunge. Again Humming-Bird shot up into the air.

“Alight on the lower part of his back,” commanded Grey Sprite. “He can’t reach us there.

“I wish,” said he, “you would not make those nervous gestures. You frighten Humming-Bird; he is very timid.”

Old Turtle grew frantic with rage, twisting his head back as far as he could

get it, and reaching up in vain attempts to scratch them off with his hind feet. Failing in this, he abruptly plunged into the water while Humming-Bird and his rider skimmed away to the bush, where sat Blackbird and a number of his friends looking on.

"I told you that you could do nothing with him," said Blackbird. "My! but you were lucky to escape. I thought he had you that first time."

"There was no danger," replied Grey Sprite. "Humming-Bird was watching him as a cat watches a mouse, and the turtle doesn't live that can catch him. To tell the truth, I did not expect to get him to tell me for the asking, but now I am going to *make* him tell. When you said he liked his sunshine as well as his food, you gave me the clew I was looking for. I will take it as a great favor if you birds will tell me whenever you see him stick his head

out of water. I am going to try to make it very interesting for him."

Just then one of the blackbirds called out, "Here he comes," and Old Turtle began to pull himself leisurely up on the rock again.

"Poise just over him," directed Grey Sprite, and as Humming-Bird obeyed, he let fly with one of the stones, hitting Old Turtle squarely on the end of the nose. The onslaught was so sudden that Old Turtle in a panic promptly slid off into the water. After a moment he came to the top again, and stuck his head out to see what in the world it was that attacked him. Bang! came another stone full on the top of his head, and down he went again. This time he settled down into the mud to think it over; his sluggish brain, never very good at its best, was very much disturbed by this strange attack, but he had gone down so quickly that he had not had

time to get much air, so presently he tried again, coming up quite a little way off.

By now, all the blackbirds of the swamp had learned what was going on, and immediately he was seen, word was passed along to Humming-Bird, watching not far away, so that he had barely got his bleary old eyes opened when another sharp stone took him just between those eyes, and again he scuttled hastily to the bottom. It was fully an hour before he made another attempt to get up on his rock, but Humming-Bird was perched there awaiting him, and he received such a warm reception that he sulked all the rest of the day in the mud at the bottom of the swamp, giving himself up to plots of revenge.

The following morning dawned clear and bright, and soon the rocks and logs in the swamp were covered with turtles enjoying to the full the pleasant and healthy sun-bath. Old Turtle had succeeded in capturing the fat, young muskrat he had



dreamed about, and was all ready to top off with a lazy nap on his favorite rock. Swimming leisurely alongside, he pulled his heavy shell out of the water, and had just relaxed with a huge sigh of content when the angry buzz was heard again as Humming-Bird dashed up, and whack! came another one of those dreadful stones right on sorest place hit by yesterday's bombardment. Old Turtle tried to brave it out, but the missiles came too fast, their aim was too sure, and almost suffocating from mortification, fear, and rage, he was quickly forced to slide into the water again, and never once that day could he get his head up for more than a minute before he would have to dodge under to escape the terrible punishment that Grey Sprite was handing out to him. The worry of it all, together with the loss of his sun-bath, which really was very necessary to him, began to tell on him so much that, when on the next morning he found that

he couldn't eat a bite, he gave in. Crawling out on his rock, he watched anxiously for his tormenters, and as soon as he saw them coming, cried out, "I will tell you what you want to know."

"All right," said Grey Sprite, "but be very sure you tell me correctly, for if you play me false, I will come back and hound you to death, and you shall have no pay on account of your treachery. Now what do you know about it?"

"Honestly," said Old Turtle, "I don't know very much. I can only direct you to the one who does know where it is kept, and who has seen it. He told me."

"Who is he, and where can I find him?" demanded Grey Sprite.

"It is Gold Stripe, the Spider, and he lives over in yonder field."

"All right," said Grey Sprite severely, "be very sure you are not deceiving me, for I shall show you no mercy if you do."

"I am not deceiving you," protested Old

Turtle, but, as he spoke, he closed his eyes, for fear Grey Sprite might see the gleam of triumph in them; he was sure that he was sending Grey Sprite to his death.

No one was more crafty and wicked than Gold Stripe.

### *Part V*

Grey Sprite was for making the acquaintance of Gold Stripe at once, but Humming-Bird protested.

"I am willing to help you to the limit of my strength," he said, "but I think we both need some rest, and I would suggest we take a day's vacation. My nerves are all a-flutter," and as Grey Sprite looked closely at his little friend, he saw that in truth he was sadly worn out. So he agreed, and a day was spent in sleep and refreshment.

When the next morning dawned, they felt ready to continue their task with good

courage. It was not long before, over in the field, they saw a beautiful web gleaming in the sunlight, with myriad little dew-drops on it—like a veritable Jewel itself. Hovering close over it Grey Sprite called, “Gold Stripe! Gold Stripe!”

“Who calls me?” said a voice, and out of a cunningly concealed door appeared the most beautiful spider they had ever seen. He was black as ink, and his body was striped with bars of shining gold.

“It is I,” said Grey Sprite, “a Fairy of the Queen’s Court, and I am seeking the Ancient Jewel.” Instantly the pleasantest smile came over Gold Stripe’s face.

“Welcome! Most welcome!” cried he. “What honor; what great honor this is! From the great Queen’s own Court! Oh, what a red-letter day this is! Pray alight, not on my web, for it is sticky and would soil your clothes, but down there on the moss, and I will come down to you.”

“He’s too friendly on short ac-



quaintance,” whispered Humming-Bird. “Look out for him.”

Grey Sprite thought it prudent to stay on Humming-Bird’s back, but Gold Stripe seemed so glad to see them and was so anxious to help, that presently he grew ashamed of his suspicions and slid off on to the moss.

“Just think,” gurgled Gold Stripe, “one of the Queen’s own Courtiers! Won’t you please tell me all about the Court and what they do? I have never even seen one of you before.”

So Grey Sprite, not wishing to spoil the good impression he seemed to be making, sat down and told him all about the Fairies—how they lived and what they did—and described the Fairy Queen as well as he could. Gold Stripe listened as though spellbound, continually asking new questions, and then he begged that Grey Sprite would let him feel of the shining clothes that he wore.

“How long can you stay with me?” he cried. “This visit is something I shall look back to all my life.”

“I cannot delay, I fear,” said Grey Sprite, “for the need of haste is very urgent, and I have lost a lot of time. You shall have a great reward for helping me, you know.”

“Reward!” said Gold Stripe. “It will be reward enough to me just to have seen you and talked with you, and have had a little chance to help the beautiful Fairy Queen; but really you must stay with me till tomorrow morning, for I’ve got to get out my map and refresh my memory. The directions are very complicated. There is a wonderful bush over on the other side of the field where Humming-Bird can get the sweetest nectar he ever tasted, and a crystal spring where both of you can bathe and refresh yourselves. You know there’s a hard journey ahead of you.”

He said all this in such a friendly way



GOLD STRIPE SEEMED SO GLAD TO SEE THEM. — *Page 69.*





that even suspicious Humming-Bird felt ashamed of himself for having doubted him, and Grey Sprite said, "All right, go over and have a good feast, Humming-Bird, and I will stay here talking with Gold Stripe."

So away went the faithful little bird, his mind entirely at ease at the prospect of a speedy end to their searching.

"You see," said Gold Stripe, "I was appointed long, long ago by the Gnomes, when they first found the Ancient Jewel, to be one of the guardians of the secret place, because I, alone of all the Woods People, could make a written record. The Gnomes could not use the Jewel, for it shows the truth of everything, and that is just what they don't want. So they hid it. In those days I guess I used to be pretty bad myself, and they gave me this position and these gold stripes as my reward, but I know better now, and I shall be glad to see the Jewel go where it can do

good, and also to get the worry of having to guard the secret from my mind. I have a most wonderful map in my laboratory, showing how to reach it, and no one has ever seen it but myself. I tell you it is a masterpiece, and I am proud of it."

"I wish I might see it," cried Grey Sprite, carried away by his overpowering desire to learn about the Jewel.

"Well, why not?" said Gold Stripe, "if I am going to tell you all about it, what harm is there in showing you the map? I will have to strengthen the stairs to my laboratory though, for you might fall through. It won't take me long," and bidding him lie and rest, Gold Stripe hastened away.

Once out of sight, the innocent look vanished, and in its place one of deepest craft and wickedness appeared. "Aha, I have him nibbling. Soon I shall hook him, and then I shall add another pretty Fairy jacket to my collection," he cried to

himself, and very rapidly he began to strengthen his web so that Grey Sprite would be held fast.

When he had satisfied himself that all was ready, he called out, "Now if you will walk out on that limb on the left and jump down carefully where I point, we will go in and see my wonderful map." Grey Sprite climbed out on the limb and obediently jumped where he was told, only to sink into the sticky net, where he struggled furiously to clear himself but became enmeshed more and more every movement. Suddenly a noose fell about his arms, and Gold Stripe, jeering in derision, raced about him, spinning rope after rope which he drew tightly about the poor little Fairy, until he could no longer struggle. Even then he did not desist, but kept on binding the silken, sticky ropes about him until he had entirely hidden from view all except his little face, for it was Gold Stripe's intention to keep him alive for a while and

fatten him up before he ate him. Where only a few moments ago stood a jaunty little Fairy full of courage and determination now lay a motionless object that no one would even suspect was the same thing, and oh, the despair that overwhelmed poor Grey Sprite as he realized how he had been tricked!

“Oho!” jeered the wicked spider. “You little guessed I was seeing how fat you were when you thought I was only feeling your pretty jacket. Wait, and I will show you another. I am making a collection of them,” and hurrying away, he came back presently with a little stained jacket, which revealed to Grey Sprite at once why one of the Fairies that had started out to find the Jewel had never returned.

“I told you the truth about one thing,” laughed Gold Stripe. “I do know where the Jewel is, and I am going to tell you; but little good will it do you to know, for you will never look upon it. That Moun-



tain you see over yonder is the Treasure House of the Gnomes. In it lives Blind Toad ceaselessly guarding the Ancient Jewel. There is only one entrance, and that is where the brook comes out of the side of the Mountain. As soon as you crawl under the opening, you will see a passage-way carved out of the solid rock."

Then in the most tantalizing fashion, the cruel spider proceeded to describe how one had to follow this passage, then that, where the guards were stationed, and the passwords that were used, until at last he described the great hall full of the Gnomes' gold, at the farther end of which sat Blind Toad, ceaselessly guarding the Jewel. He even told him what to say to prevent the Toad from backing into his retreat with the Gem, and closing the trap-door.

"Just think," he jeered, "now you are within striking distance of what you have come so far to get, and you know all the

secret passages and the passwords, but instead of bearing it off with you in triumph, you are going to stay here all tied up until I think you are fat enough, and then I shall eat you up," and he roared with laughter.

"Aha! here comes some more supper," he cried, as a poor little fly blundered into the sticky web. "Excuse me, I beg of you, while I attend to him," he mocked, and hurried off to make him fast.

Left to himself, Grey Sprite no longer gave way to 'despair. He knew that Humming-Bird was at large, and would leave no stone unturned to find him. So he set himself at work fixing the directions, the spider had given him, fast in his memory.

In the meantime, Humming-Bird had found the nectar bush just as Gold Stripe had told him, and had feasted to his heart's content. His mind was entirely at ease, and he could see no reason why he should not enjoy himself. So he splashed about

in the crystal spring until he was the most bedraggled bird that was ever seen, and then up on a little twig in the sun he began to shake himself and preen his feathers. Soon they were dry, and shining like brown satin. Every last one of them lay smooth and bright in its place. Then, as a feeling of pleasant drowsiness came over him, he closed his eyes just for a moment, and in spite of himself was fast asleep in the twinkling of an eye.

He might have slept all the rest of the day and through the night, for he really was very tired, had it not been that Fly-catcher came along that way, and espied him sleeping on the limb. Now Fly-catcher was a particular friend of Humming-Bird's, and had not seen him for a long time. He was so astonished to meet him there that he could not keep from waking him up to speak with him. When the drowsy bird finally opened his eyes and recognized his friend, he was very much

pleased, and they began to talk over their experiences. Presently Humming-Bird mentioned Gold Stripe's name, and remarking the look of grave concern that instantly came over Flycatcher's face, said, "Why, what is the matter, isn't he all right?"

"Do you mean to tell me," returned Flycatcher, "that you have left Grey Sprite alone with that bloody bandit? I very much fear that you will never see him alive again. Come, let us hurry and we may be lucky enough to get there in time to save his life."

Never had their little wings moved so quickly, and in almost less time than it takes to tell it, they were hovering over Gold Stripe's web.

Gold Stripe was expecting to see Humming-Bird back again, but he had Grey Sprite so wrapped up that his own Mother could not have recognized him. He had taken the precaution to put a big



gag in his mouth, both to prevent his crying for help, and also to cover up his face. He had prepared a very cunning story to tell Humming-Bird as to how the Fairy couldn't wait, but had started off alone after the Jewel, and he was already laughing in his sleeve at how he fancied Humming-Bird would dart away in his efforts to overtake his master.

But when he saw Humming-Bird's companion, he was keenly disappointed, for Flycatcher knew all of his tricks, and had a very sharp bill. So he made for a secret retreat that he always kept ready for emergencies where he was safe from the angry birds.

"Grey Sprite, Grey Sprite!" called Humming-Bird in an agonized tone. No answer came.

"That must be the poor little fellow rolled up there," said Flycatcher, pointing to where Grey Sprite lay. Humming-Bird hovered over the closely wrapped

mass and could see the face of his comrade although it was partly concealed by the big gag Spider had forced into his mouth to prevent him from crying out.

Immediately the two birds began to pull away the clinging threads, and soon they were able to carry the whole mass to the ground, and found, to Humming-Bird's intense joy, that Grey Sprite was still alive, and not so much the worse for his adventure. With his arms once more around Humming-Bird's neck, they flew to the spring where the sticky mass was washed away.

### *Part VI*

"Oh, Humming-Bird, I forgot to tell you," suddenly cried Grey Sprite, "I have the directions for reaching the Jewel. Let us start at once before Gold Stripe can give the alarm."

As they passed over Gold Stripe's web,

Grey Sprite called loudly, "I am going for the Jewel now, but be very sure you shall see me again," and over Gold Stripe's heart settled a great dread, for he had betrayed the secret of the Gnomes, and he feared the vengeance of Grey Sprite.

Thanking Flycatcher for his assistance, they flew directly to the Mountain of the Gnomes, and began to hunt for the brook that flowed from its side. They were not long in discovering this, and sat for some little time discussing the situation.

"It is plain enough," said Grey Sprite, "that you cannot accompany me in there. What I accomplish after this I must do alone, and no one can tell what will happen, but I am going in, and shall do my best. If I never come out again, tell the Queen where the Jewel is hidden, and give her all the directions for reaching it. We have accomplished that much, at least, and it will be easier for some one else later on to begin where we leave off, and perhaps

succeed. However, I *am* coming back again, and I shall have the Jewel with me. You had better stay hidden in this tree and be ready to come to my assistance quickly when you hear me call, for I may come out of that hole in a wonderful hurry."

"I dread to see you go in there," said Humming-Bird anxiously, "but I can think of nothing else to 'do. You can count upon my being ready whenever you call. Good-by; keep up a brave heart."

So Grey Sprite entered on the last stage of his wearisome quest, and he knew he was going into a hostile fortress, and that there was no way out except that by which he had entered, but his courage never faltered a moment, and carefully reviewing the directions Gold Stripe had given him, he dipped down under the rocky rim of the hole where the brook came out, and immediately stood in a low sort of cave. Straight ahead was inky blackness. That



must be the tunnel, he thought, so stepping very carefully he worked his way slowly ahead, keeping in touch with the wall on the right. Soon he came to what seemed to be a passage-way leading off at right angles. "This," he thought, "is number one."

Crossing this, he felt his way along until again he came to another opening. "Number two," he murmured.

Again he pushed ahead and soon had passed number three. "Next one is where the fun begins," he said, and anxiously realized the trouble that would happen if by any chance the password were incorrect. "Gold Stripe may have lied about that, or it may have been changed.

"Well, here goes!" he said, and making all the noise he could, walked boldly forward. As he turned into the fourth passage, a light shone suddenly, almost blinding him, and there stood a group of

ugly-looking, little fellows with sharp spears, all leveled at him, and these cried with one voice, "The password!"

"Starlight, shine bright," called back Grey Sprite in a clear, steady voice, although he could feel his knees shaking. At the words, the group fell back, half on each side, and without a word lowered their spears as a sign that he could pass. Walking boldly past them and glancing neither to the left nor the right, Grey Sprite pushed along into the deep gloom of the next passage. Here he stopped a moment to rest and get his breath, for his heart was beating so fast from the excitement it seemed as though it would burst. In a few moments he was himself again, and with increased confidence pressed on to the next turn to the left.

Here again he was stopped by another group armed with shining swords, all pointed straight at his heart. "The password!" they cried, and this time he could

clearly make out the gleaming eyes and the fierce faces.

"Starlight, shine bright in the night," boldly quoted Grey Sprite, and without a moment's hesitation, he advanced in the most confident manner upon them. Bowing to the ground, this group, as the others, separated, and he passed them as safely as he had done the first.

"Only one more test," he joyfully thought. "Oh, if the password only holds true!"

For some distance now the tunnel wound in a curving direction, weaving back and forth like a snake, and Grey Sprite, although he kept constantly in touch with the left-hand wall, began to worry lest in some way he had gone by the last opening, for this was closed by a heavy door. Just at that moment, however, he felt its knob, and summoning all his courage, knocked three times. Slowly the door swung open, and a brilliant light

shone out, and before him stood a large band of the fiercest-looking Gnomes he had yet seen. Besides the gleaming swords stuck in their belts, they carried in their hands bows with the arrows drawn to the head, and every arrow was pointed at Grey Sprite's heart. "The password!" they shrieked, and at the menacing scream, his blood almost froze in his veins. But he never faltered in his reply.

"Starlight, shine bright in the night."

Then one of the band sprang in front of the others and cried, "What does it show?"

"Truth," answered Grey Sprite, and instantly the threatening bows were lowered, and the leader prostrating himself before him said, "What are thy commands for thy slaves?"

At that moment Grey Sprite heard a distant shouting, and like a flash the thought came to him that he was discovered. Calmly he held out his hand.

"Rise, slave," he said in his loftiest tone.



"I am pursued by enemies who will try to pass you, claiming that I am an impostor. Hold this door to the last man. Let no one enter the chamber," and again looking neither to the left nor to the right, he entered at last into the treasure hall of the Gnomes. It was shining with a golden light, and vaguely he sensed the heaps of gold, but stopping for nothing he hastened towards the end of the room and there, as Gold Stripe had told him, sat a huge toad. In front of him on a golden cushion lay the Ancient Jewel, shining with a steady, mellow light. At the sound of his footsteps, Blind Toad seized the Jewel in his mouth and began to back hastily into the space below.

"Truth must be revealed," called Grey Sprite, and instantly the toad paused, waiting for the next words which Grey Sprite immediately added, "by the Ancient Jewel."

"Master," murmured the old guardian.

Grey Sprite came close.

“Listen, Blind Toad,” said he, “and the Jewel will tell you if I do not speak truly. The Gnomes have hidden this gem because they do not love the right and only care for evil. Is it not so, O Starlight of the World?” and at his words the Jewel shone for a moment with a light so intense that even Blind Toad knew he had spoken the truth. “They have deceived you and have kept you blinded, an unknowing accomplice to their wickedness.” Again the wonderful light filled the whole cavern.

“Who are you?” cried Blind Toad.

“I,” answered Grey Sprite, “am the ambassador of the Fairy Queen and I have passed through all kinds of peril, even the guards of the Gnomes, to get to you and tell you this.”

As he spoke the words, he heard the clashing of arms back at the door. The guards he had left were being attacked by



HE ENTERED AT LAST INTO THE TREASURE HALL OF THE  
GNOMES.—*Page 87.*





the other Gnomes, who with Gold Stripe at their head, had followed fast upon Grey Sprite's trail. Gold Stripe called to them to let them pass, but to no avail, and immediately the whole band was engaged in a deadly struggle.

"Quick, quick, Blind Toad!" cried Grey Sprite. "Give me the Ancient Jewel to take to the Fairy Queen, and I promise you that she will protect you and will give you eyes like Jewels which shall go down to all your children forever. Am I not speaking the truth, O Ancient Jewel?"

Again the wonderful light shone over everything. Grey Sprite glanced back at the door, and to his horror saw Gold Stripe racing toward him. In some way he had slipped by the guards.

"Quick, Blind Toad, into your hole," he cried, and plunged in after him. Blind Toad lowered the trap-door, and for the moment they were safe from all the world. Then for the first time it occurred to him

that Gold Stripe had said there was but one entrance to the Mountain, and he realized that although he had accomplished his purpose and held in his hand the Mystic Jewel, for desire of which his Queen was pining away, yet he was trapped and could never go back.

Blind Toad sensed his thought, and said in a gentle tone, "Do not despair. Many years ago there came a horrible noise, and this whole mountain shook and shivered for a long time. Great groanings and horrible snapping sounds filled all the air. Then it was quiet again, and we breathed and found that we were still living. Later, when I had retired to my den to rest, I found a wide crack in the wall, and following it, I breathed air that from its freshness I knew came from the outside world. I think we can escape by that way."

Looking where he pointed, Grey Sprite could see a ragged crevice in the wall.

"Come, let us go at once," he said, and

holding the Jewel in front of him, the way was made as bright as day. Many twists and turns there were, and in some places heavy rocks had to be moved to let Blind Toad through, but at length they came to the opening, and Grey Sprite rejoiced to breathe once more the pure air of the outside world. Never had the blue sky and the sunlight looked so good to him.

He was for calling Humming-Bird at once, but Blind Toad said, "What about me? What am I going to do?" and Grey Sprite realized that although Humming-Bird could carry him and the Jewel, Blind Toad's great weight was far beyond his strength. Drawing back into the passage, they tried to think of some way to provide for the latter's safety. At length Grey Sprite cried, "I have it. Have you ever told any one of this opening?"

"No," replied the Toad.

"Good," continued Grey Sprite. "Then you will remain here close to the entrance.

I will hasten to the Court with the Jewel. The Queen will give me power to change you into a Fairy like myself, and we will return to her and she will continue you in your office as the Keeper of the Jewel. What I promised about all the toads having jeweled eyes shall still hold good. Is that not right, Jewel?" and Old Toad could sense through all his nerves the wondrous response of the Jewel.

### *Part VII*

The beautiful day was drawing to a close. Everywhere Nature could be seen at her best. Cooling showers earlier in the day had washed the dust from the leaves and flowers, and everywhere was happiness except in the one spot where it should, by rights, have been most pronounced: the Court of the Fairies. For a while after Grey Sprite's departure, the Queen had resumed her old happy self,



and her little people who lived on her smiles grew correspondingly gay; but a long time had passed. Brown Moth had returned bearing tales of failure, and from that time nothing had been heard of the little hero. From worrying about the Jewel, the Queen's anxieties had turned upon Grey Sprite.

"I fear I have sent him to his death," she confessed to Woodbine one night, as the latter was brushing out the luxuriant fluffy hair of her mistress. "The others I have not minded so much, for we did not realize the danger of the quest. But we all knew the risk when Grey Sprite went, and in spite of it I did not forbid his departure." And she broke out into the most violent weeping. Through all this time Woodbine had never once faltered in her belief that her faithful friend would some day return bearing the Jewel with him, but to-night she was tired and very lonesome, and the Queen's fears sank

deeply into her heart in a way that they had never done before. A great horror crept over her. What if poor Grey Sprite had fallen prey to some terrible thing and was dead, and she would never see him again! Things began to swim before her eyes, and staggering to the window she drew in the fresh air striving desperately to get back her self-control, when suddenly she called out, "Oh, Your Majesty, come here, quick! quick!" and began to dance about, as though she had gone out of her senses. The Queen, in her anxiety for Woodbine, forgot for the moment her own trouble and hastened to her side, only to stand gazing in astonishment at the courtyard below, for there, surrounded by an ever-increasing crowd of cheering Fairies, stood a brown Humming-Bird, and on his back sat Grey Sprite smiling and waving his hand.

"Grey Sprite! Grey Sprite!" called Woodbine, and glancing up to the win-

dow whence the two eager faces looked out together, he waved his hat in happy triumph. "He has it! He has it, I know!" cried Woodbine, as she danced for sheer joy about her mistress. "Oh, come, let me get you ready quickly, for it would not be seemly for the Queen to appear in such disarray."

The Queen was on her throne of state, surrounded by her Courtiers! The Master of Ceremonies was advancing before her as she sat surrounded by all the great ones of her Court! Behind him came Grey Sprite, carrying something on a golden salver covered with a golden cloth. The Master of Ceremonies held up his hand and announced:

"Grey Sprite with the Ancient Jewel," and all the trumpeters of the Queen's Court blew as loudly as they could, and all the Fairies cheered and waved their hands, and cheered again and again until they were so hoarse that they no longer

could make themselves heard. Poor Grey Sprite almost wished himself back in Gold Stripe's web, he was so embarrassed. When quiet was at last restored, he stepped forward, and kneeling at her feet placed the Jewel in his Queen's hand, and then stole a look at Woodbine who was standing just behind her. What he saw in her eyes satisfied him, even if he got no other reward. The Queen took the Jewel reverently, and gazed at Grey Sprite through streaming eyes. "Faithful, loyal Fairy," said she, and instantly the Jewel glowed with such a brilliant light that she almost dropped it in her astonishment, "what can your Queen do to reward you?"

"Your Majesty," answered Grey Sprite, "I have but two requests to make."

"Name them," said the Queen; "they are granted even before you make them known."

"First, I ask honors for my brave companions," said Grey Sprite, "without



whose help I could never have succeeded. Brown Moth carried me on his broad back, and really started me."

"Brown Moth," said the Queen, "shall have beautiful wings in the future, banded and marked with rich colors, and his body shall be covered with fur striped with red and white bands. No moth of the night, save my own, shall be more beautiful than he."

"Then there was Red Lizard."

"He," said the Queen, "shall have a beautiful gold stripe down each side of his back."

"The Blackbirds' help was invaluable," continued Grey Sprite.

"The Blackbirds shall wear forevermore scarlet and gold epaulets on their shoulders," promised the Queen.

"It was Flycatcher's warning and help that saved me from death at the hands of Gold Stripe," said Grey Sprite.

"Flycatcher and all that come after him

shall wear a crest on top of the head as a memento," was the response.

"Now about Blind Toad. You see I was in a 'desperate fix, and only had a few moments to persuade him to come over to our side, and I promised him that if he would do so, you would change him to a Fairy, make him Keeper of the Jewel here at your Court, and give him and all the race of toads eyes like Jewels," and Grey Sprite gazed anxiously into the face of his Queen.

"All shall be as you promised," smiled she.

"Last but not least, gallant Humming-Bird. What can you do for him?"

"Come here, Humming-Bird," called the Queen, for he was looking on among the throng of Courtiers. As he advanced, the Queen waved her wand, and a wonderful change took place. A loud murmur of admiration filled the room, for instantly the plain little brown bird was changed

into the most beautiful creature they had ever seen. He shone all over with the colors of the Jewel, and at his throat blazed a great ruby. "For you and yours forever," cried the Queen, and to this day he flits from flower to flower, a living gem.

“Now that we have finished with your friends,” said the Queen, smiling, “suppose you ask something for yourself.”

A look of grim determination settled over Grey Sprite's countenance. "Your Majesty," he said, "at the foot of the Gnome's mountain dwells a wicked, bloody-minded bandit, Gold Stripe. He murders every innocent creature that comes along, and on his wall is hanging the blood-stained coat of one of our brothers. I ask for myself a leave of absence from the Court. I have an account to settle with him, and I wish to pay it."

“Is there nothing else you wish?” asked the Queen.

“Nothing, Your Majesty,” said Grey

Sprite. "The pleasure of bringing to you your heart's desire is for me the greatest reward I can conceive of."

At this the Queen clapped her hands. A door opened and two pages bore into the room a wonderful suit of armor that shone like burnished silver; also a glittering sword hanging from a belt of gold. "Put them on him, Woodbine," smiled the Queen. When the last buckle was clasped, she cried, "Kneel, sir," and as Grey Sprite knelt before her, she drew the sword from its jeweled sheath, and striking him lightly on the shoulder, said in a clear voice:

"I dub you my especial Guard and give you the Impenetrable Armor and the Invincible Sword. I also give you permission to settle your account with Gold Stripe, but that can wait a little while, for I think you need rest," and as Grey Sprite glanced over her shoulder, his eyes met those of the Queen's favorite attend-



ant, and what they told him made him decide that his Queen knew best.

And this is how the Ancient Jewel left its abode in the Mountain of the Gnomes and came to be at the Court of the Fairy Queen.

## CHAPTER III

### THE RESCUE OF THE FIVE FAIRIES

“**G**REY SPRITE,” asked the Queen, “why it it that when every one is so happy, and you should be most so, I see no smiles on your face?”

“How can I laugh, Your Majesty,” he returned, “when, ever before my eyes, waking or sleeping, I see that little stained jacket; and always in my ears are ringing the screams of the poor victims struggling in the toils of that wicked Spider? I shall never smile again until with your permission I have rid the world of him.”

The Queen, looking into his determined face, knew that he spoke truly, and that it was best that he should go. But she dreaded to meet the accusing eyes of her

little Handmaid when the latter should learn of it.

Grey Sprite's purpose was almost shaken when a little later Woodbine came rushing to him, and with trembling lips begged that he would give up his plans. "Let some one else do this," she cried; "you have been through enough peril."

"No, Woodbine," he answered, smiling sadly. "This is my job, and no one else can do it. I could never hold up my head again, if I passed it by," and he comforted her as best he might, while she sobbed bitterly on his shoulder.

The whole Court assembled to see him off the next morning, and as he circled about, clad in his shining armor and mounted upon his faithful Humming-Bird gemmed with all the colors of the rainbow, they cheered and cheered, until with a final wave of his hand, he darted away in the direction of Gnome-Land. But the Queen had a very hard time all the

rest of the day trying in vain to comfort a certain little Fairy whom she loved very dearly, and who did nothing but weep and moan, "Oh, you should never have let him go!"

The fresh morning breeze and the exhilaration of the speed at which they were traveling soon drove all thoughts of sorrow from his mind, however, and as he began to lay his plans, his lips pursed up in a merry whistle, and Humming-Bird, who had kept an anxious eye upon him, remarked to himself, "I'll risk him now."

All day they flew swiftly toward the west, and as night came on, found a safe place to rest, and slept soundly till the Morning Star sent out its summons to the wood-folk to rouse and prepare for another day. After a good breakfast of honey, they resumed their journey, and so for a number of days they sped along, till just as they had begun to think of camping for another night, Humming-Bird sud-



denly cried, "Does not that mountain off on the horizon have a familiar look?" and Grey Sprite felt a sudden momentary tightening of his breath, for it was the Mountain of the Gnomes, and he was nearing the meadow where Gold Stripe lived. After scouting about for some supper, they found a snug spot in a thick fir-tree, and were busily engaged in their plans for the morrow, when with a powerful, swinging flight, a large, black woodpecker lit close beside them.

Noticing how plump the bird was, Grey Sprite asked him how he kept so fat?

"Well," laughed the woodpecker, "the truth of the matter is that I have so much to eat, and get it so easily, that it is ruining my health. You see there is a very curious old chap who lives in the defile that leads through the mountains into Gnome-Land. Some say that he is a sorcerer, and I believe he is, myself; anyway, he has five of

the funniest-looking mice working for him, and all day long he keeps them gnawing around trees until they are girdled; of course you know that then they die, and this chap sells them to the worms, and gets a big price for them. I hang around and keep sampling the trees until they are soft enough, and then I get the worms. I tell you I have a choice assortment of trees."

Grey Sprite was quite interested in the story, and asked what the sorcerer's name was.

"They call him Praying Mantis about here," Woodpecker answered. "He is always pretending to be praying. At first glance you might take him for a big grasshopper, but he carries a very sharp sword, and I guess he knows how to use it pretty well, from what I hear. Every one around here is afraid of him, and the way he treats those poor mice is scandalous. They look half starved, and he is continually beating them."

"I think, Humming-Bird," said Grey Sprite, "we will call upon this gentleman when we get through with our present business, and make his acquaintance. There appears to be something queer going on there."

In the morning they said good-by to Woodpecker, and after a hearty breakfast, started out with the feeling that before night, they would have reached a conclusion with Gold Stripe.

It was about noon when they spied the great swamp where Old Turtle lived, and they could see the Blackbirds, vain in their new, scarlet epaulets, flitting about. But they did not make themselves known, for it was Grey Sprite's intention to take Gold Stripe by surprise, and they did not intend that any rumor of their coming should get about.

Circling high above the meadow where he lived, they could see his web, but there was no sign of the Spider. "Well, let us

get closer," said Grey Sprite, and as they darted quickly down beside it, Grey Sprite, drawing his sword, cut through one of the supports of the web so that it sagged to the ground.

No Spider appeared, and then they noticed that the web was all torn and dirty. Cutting away the other supports, it collapsed entirely, and falling, disclosed the entrance to the cavern where Gold Stripe was accustomed to hide when danger threatened.

Looking in, Grey Sprite could see no sign of his enemy, and, telling Humming-Bird to keep close at hand ready for any emergency, he descended into the cave.

Everything looked deserted and neglected, and the Fairy could easily see that there had been no one living there for some time past. On the wall before him was hanging the little jacket that Gold Stripe had so exultingly exhibited, and with a feeling of pity for the unfortunate



owner, Grey Sprite wrapped it round his arm and then climbed out to the daylight again.

Here he found Humming-Bird deep in conversation with a group of Crickets who had gathered to find out what was going on, and were busily retailing all the gossip of the neighborhood to their brilliant listener.

“We have important news from our friends here,” he cried, as he caught sight of Grey Sprite clambering out of the den. “Our search is over before we have hardly begun it. Gold Stripe has been carried off a captive to Gnome Mountain, and by this time has probably paid the penalty for his thoughtlessness in telling you the passwords.”

As he finished speaking, one of the Crickets caught sight of the jacket on Grey Sprite’s arm and began to laugh. “That was a good joke on Gold Stripe,” said he.

“What do you mean?” demanded the Fairy.

“Why, quite a long time ago, a Fairy came along here, inquiring about the Ancient Jewel. Gold Stripe tricked him and got him tangled up in his web. He took his jacket off and went round showing it to all the spiders in the neighborhood, boasting about his capture. But when he went back to eat him, the Fairy had gone. In some way he had freed himself and made good his escape. Gold Stripe was furious, and hunted the whole country over looking for him, and although he always claimed that he found him and ate him up, no one ever believed that he told the truth. That jacket was all he ever got.”

“Can you tell me where the Fairy went?” asked Grey Sprite.

“No, we never knew what became of him,” returned Cricket, “but we always thought that he got through to Gnome-

Land and, of course, that was the end of him."

Grey Sprite chuckled to himself. "If he but knew it, he is talking to one Fairy who has been to Gnome-Land and hasn't reached his end yet," but he kept his peace, and only remarked, "I am glad he got away from Gold Stripe, anyway."

"Well," said Humming-Bird, "I don't see anything to keep us here any longer. What do you say, shall we hunt for Praying Mantis, and find out what he is up to?"

"Yes," said Grey Sprite, "it cannot be far from here. Woodpecker claimed that he lived in the defile that goes through the mountains to Gnome-Land."

Once again upon their journey, they flew straight towards the forest in the defile, and soon they began to notice frequent dead trees all having been girdled, and in many of them they could see the holes that Woodpecker had bored.

"I wish," remarked Grey Sprite, "that

we could run across some one who lives here, and find out what the people in the forest think of Mantis. Let us keep a sharp lookout."

So Humming-Bird slowed up and dropped down closer to the ground. After flying a little way, he suddenly spied a White-Footed Mouse hopping across a small, open space, and flying close to him, called out, "Greetings, White-Foot." The mouse seemed a little frightened for a moment, but Grey Sprite soon set him at ease, and then asked if he knew anything about Praying Mantis.

At the name, White-Foot grew pale and looked about, as if seeking some avenue of escape.

"I know all I want to about him," he at length murmured in a low tone, as if afraid of being overheard. "You want to keep away from him. He is a very wicked and powerful sorcerer."

"What is it about the five mice he has



working for him?" asked Grey Sprite. "Have you any acquaintance with them?"

"No," said White-Foot. "No one ever talks with them. He doesn't allow them out of his sight for a minute. I tell you it is the most pitiful sight. He nearly starves them, and keeps them working from morning till night, and I often hear them scream as he beats them. I don't believe they are real mice. You see he has a magic bed in his house. It looks very inviting, and when weary travelers come there, he puts them to bed, and then they are in his power and he does as he likes with them. If you are wise, you will keep very far from him," and pleading an important engagement, White-Foot hurried away.

"More and more interesting," said Humming-Bird. "Praying Mantis must be bad, and I think you had better be very careful in your dealings with him."

As the afternoon sun was still high in the

heavens, Grey Sprite suggested that they look about through the woods, and perhaps find Mantis and his crew at work.

So they circled about, darting in and out through the forest until all at once in the distance they saw figures moving about a tree.

"I think they are there," said Grey Sprite. "Go as near as you can, but don't let them see us."

Flying carefully up to a tree with very thick leaves, they alighted on a branch and looked down upon a queer sight.

Praying Mantis was a most terrible-looking object. He had a huge body, and projecting a long distance in front of it was his small head, entirely out of proportion. . But his front legs attracted Grey Sprite's attention most of all. These were like arms, very long and muscular, and growing out of each was a sharp sword. He was continually screaming out orders to five pitifully thin mice, who were

grouped about a tree and gnawing, as if for life, at the bark. Did one of them slow up for a minute, Old Mantis would scream at him, and several times while they were watching, he struck a poor, little mouse a terrible blow with the flat of his sword.

Grey Sprite's blood boiled at the sight, but he restrained himself, for he wished to learn more about the whole affair before interfering.

So he whispered to Humming-Bird, "Let us find his house, and I will meet him there."

Down below they could see a well-worn path, leading back towards the 'defile, and flying along over this, they soon came to a large, open cave.

"This must be the place," said Humming-Bird, and on the word, flew down to the ground beside it, allowing Grey Sprite to alight.

When no one answered his knock, Grey

Sprite ventured to enter. There was plenty of light, as the front was all open. On one side stood a table littered with fragments of food. Around the back of the room was a series of boxes, each with a round hole in front. Those must be where he keeps the mice, thought Grey Sprite. But the most striking thing in the room was a large bed, all made up, and so soft and inviting-looking that the Fairy could hardly resist the temptation to lie down and take a nap; had it not been for the warning of White-Foot, he probably would have done so. But forewarned was forearmed, and resisting the feeling, Grey Sprite hurried out to where Humming-Bird was waiting for him. Having told him his plan, he sent him up in a tree close by, where he would be within easy calling distance. Then covering entirely his bright armor with a dark cloak, he hid a little way down the path to wait for the return of Mantis and his servants.



Just as the sun was setting, he saw them coming slowly along, the five mice hobbling along in front, so tired that Grey Sprite expected to see them faint any moment. Mantis kept close behind them, and it was pitiful to see in what great terror they were of him. Grey Sprite's eyes grew hard as he saw the blows the poor creatures were continually receiving.

As soon as they had passed him and had entered the cave, the Fairy followed, and knocked at the entrance. There was such an uproar going on inside that he was not heard, and glancing in, he saw Old Mantis driving the poor mice into their holes, and beating them cruelly as they went.

Again he knocked, this time making a great noise, and instantly Mantis whirled about. For a moment he glared at him with the wickedest eyes Grey Sprite had ever seen; like a flash, however, the angry look was gone and instead was one that the sorcerer intended to convey welcome.

But it was so false that it was even more repulsive than the former one.

"What do you wish?" he asked of the Fairy.

"A night's lodging," said Grey Sprite.

"Have you anything to pay for it?" inquired the greedy Mantis.

"Yes," answered Grey Sprite, "I have plenty of money."

Upon hearing this, Mantis invited him to come in and make himself at home. "Let me get you something to eat," said the Host, but Grey Sprite, not knowing what might be put into the food, politely declined, saying that he had recently supped and was not hungry.

He could not keep from jumping, when the next minute, with a savage roar, Mantis hurled a stick of wood in the direction of the mice.

"Get back in there and stay there," he yelled at the mice, for out of each hole was peeking an excited little face.

“I have no candles,” said Mantis, “and as it will soon be dark, I think I had better get you to bed now,” and as he uttered the words, a sad, little moan was heard from the mice.

“Thank you,” said Grey Sprite. “Nothing will suit me better, for I am very tired. While I am undressing, would you mind getting me a drink of fresh, cold water from the spring I saw by the path as I came up? I will pay you well for it.”

Mantis could not well refuse the request, so taking a cup from the table, he passed out of the cave.

Instantly Grey Sprite caught up a large log that was lying on the floor, wrapped his cloak about it, placed it in the bed, and covered it up with the blankets. Then concealing himself in an angle of the wall, he awaited the return of Mantis.

He had barely finished when the great creature came hurrying back with the water. Glancing at the bed and seeing, as

he thought, the Fairy safely tucked up there, he gave an exultant cry, and throwing down the water, pounced upon his supposed victim, crying out:

“Another mouse for my gang.”

Tearing the bedclothes aside, he gazed, as if petrified, for a moment upon what met his view, and then realizing quickly that he had been tricked, whirled about with a terrible roar of rage. There, facing him, stood the Fairy in his shining armor, and in his hand a flashing sword.

Never before had the Invincible Sword met such a task. His huge antagonist, with a deadly blade in each hand, and with a reach that kept his body entirely out of danger, was apparently protected from all harm, and Grey Sprite realized in a moment the peril in which he was placed.

Only a sword such as he possessed could have staved off instant death, for the two swords of Mantis rained blows upon him with the rapidity of lightning. For a



short time, he maintained the unequal contest, but although the blades of Mantis could not reach him, he began to tire, and he could see no hope of success. Just then, as he leaped back against the wall to avoid a sudden attack, he heard one of the mice squeak, "Break his swords," and instantly acting on the suggestion, he struck with all his might at one of the blades that was just descending upon him. Here the Invincible Sword could show its metal, and at the impact, it cut clear through the weapon of Praying Mantis.

With a surge of renewed courage, Grey Sprite rushed in upon his enemy, and in another second, the great sorcerer was disarmed. With a yell that caused every creature within hearing to shudder and hide, Mantis wheeled like a flash, tore away into the woods, and was never seen again. Hearing a sound behind him, Grey Sprite turned to protect himself against some new danger, but to his in-

tense astonishment, instead of five mice, there stood five little Fairies of the Queen's Court, and one of them was without a jacket.

.One by one in the times that had passed, these Fairies had found their way at last to Gnome-Land, and as they passed through the defile, weary and hungry, they had fallen easy victims to the wiles of the wicked Mantis, who had turned them all into mice and had kept them in the cruellest bondage through all these years.

As night had now fallen, they all climbed into the great soft bed that no longer could harm, and slept soundly without fear.

When Humming-Bird appeared in the morning, it was hard to tell who was more astonished, the Fairies, as they gazed at his resplendent colors and the great ruby gleaming at his throat, or he, as he saw the change that had come over the mice that he had so pitied the day before.



THERE STOOD FIVE LITTLE FAIRIES OF THE QUEEN'S COURT.  
*Page 122.*





“How can I ever carry you all?” he cried.

“It will not be necessary,” said Grey Sprite. “Go find Woodpecker. He is big enough to do it, and our Mistress, I am sure, will want to say something to him. But for his tale we should never in the world have found our brothers here.”

So back to Fairy-Land they all flew. When Woodpecker returned to his hunting-grounds again, he was for a long time so in love with the great scarlet crest the Queen had given him to wear, and spent so much time admiring himself as he saw his reflection in the spring, that he actually forgot to eat as much as usual, and so grew thin without meaning to, thus receiving a greater blessing—one he had not expected—for is not good health to be more desired than beauty?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WILD FLOWERS

“**O**RDERS from the Queen, West Wind,” and the saucy little Page waved his hand impatiently as the great wind slowly gathered himself to attention. “Go at once to Wildwood, and announce that in two weeks, on the night of the full moon, Her Majesty is coming to inspect the blossoms, and there will be the usual prize for the most beautiful, and another Fairy will be added to her Court from that locality. Hasten, for the time is short.”

Out from Fairy-Land flew the gentle West Wind, sifting along over hill and dale, over meadow, through deep, dark forests, until in the course of time he came to Wildwood, and there so thoroughly did

he carry out his instructions that not a single leaf on a bush, not a blade of grass on the ground but had heard his soft whisper as he sighed along on his journey, and in the twinkling of an eye the great contest was on.

Such a scrubbing and prinking had not been seen in Wildwood since the time Woodbine and Old Pine had each won a prize, and every flower in the glade determined that it should be successful.

The contest was different from the earlier one in that it was limited to the flowers.

June had just arrived, and her soft, warm caresses had swelled the growing buds till they were on the point of bursting into visions of beauty, and now with this to help them, they would become most lovely.

The two weeks passed all too quickly, and at last the appointed night arrived. Everywhere was beauty, but of course there were bound to be some who stood

out high above the rest, and it was of these that most of the talk was about.

Swaying on its tall, green stalk with the cluster of dark green leaves about its base, stood Lady-Slipper, a symphony in pink and green, and she had found a perfume that was so subtle and wonderful that the butterflies and great night moths were continually begging her for a little.

Close beside her, Jack-in-the-Pulpit reared his green-and-white striped coat, and although he had no wonderful colors to show, yet his whole make-up was so cleverly blended, and his greens and whites so well arranged that many came to admire and applaud him.

At the foot of a mass of broken, moss-covered rocks, where Old Oak grew, a great clump of Columbines were tossing in the breezes. They had daringly arrayed themselves in bright red and gold, and on their shiny black stems made a beautiful picture.



One night, some newcomers had appeared in the Glade. No one knew them, and they paid no attention to what was going on about them. Of a pearly white, like alabaster, and with every petal and every feature of their lovely faces as if carved, they stood like beautiful statues, modestly hanging their heads. South Wind, who could not tear himself away, finally coaxed from them their name:

“Indian Pipes,” one of them murmured, but not another word could he get from them. Oh, the masses of Violets of all kinds, from the great Horseshoe with its golden heart to the fragrant White One, coyly hiding down where the little rill trickled away to the brook in the next valley. Farther down, where the grass grew lush and long in the meadow, were the Cowslips shining as if they had found the secret lair of the Gnomes and had stolen all their gold.

Many of the lookers-on thought that the

Wild Geraniums, with their delicate lavender and pink dresses and their swaying branches would take the prize, and kept whispering to them to hold their heads high in the air so that they would surely be seen.

There was one contestant who was weeping all this time. Wild Rose had ordered some elaborate colors and had been working with feverish haste to be ready, but alas, there had been so much delay in getting her blossoms to her that she was only partly dressed; and when she thought of the wonderful effect she would have produced had she only had more time, she could not hide her disappointment.

And now, as the appointed time drew near, and the great Sun setting in the violet west was superseded by the Golden Moon rising in all her majesty, the contestants and their friends sat down to await, with what patience they could, the coming of the Fairy Queen and her Court.

From far and near the Torch-Bearers began to assemble, and the pale, golden-green light of the myriad Fireflies, together with the Moonlight, made the Glade almost as bright as day.

All about the level patch of red-topped grey moss on the big flat rock where the Court was to convene was assembling the Cricket Orchestra. In the back row were the big bass frogs, with a band of little green pipers at one side. The Katydid who had charge of the music was bustling back and forth, carrying himself as though he were the most important thing in the world.

But this was not the sight that greeted the Fairies when a little later, sitting on the broad backs of the great night moths, they floated down out of the Moonlight.

Instead of the welcoming strains of the great orchestra, they heard loud lamentations on every side, and as they looked about with amazement, instead of the

beautiful Glade filled with color and perfume, there was everywhere desolation and destruction!

Of the bunch of dancing Columbines not a blossom remained. Whole masses of violets lay dying, torn up rudely by their roots. The Lady-Slippers were gone, but two or three of their lovely blossoms lay withering upon the ground. The group of alabaster Indian Pipes, to whom South Wind had lost his heart, were lying crushed and broken, not one sculptured blossom remaining intact.

While all around and overhead, the trees and bushes wept and wailed.

“What does this mean?” demanded the Queen of the Fairies, as her gaze swept from place to place. All the trees and bushes and the little grasses answered with one voice, “The Gnomes.”

Finally, quiet was restored, and she was told that just a little while before her arrival a boisterous band of Gnomes had



burst into the Glade, and, seeing the beautiful flowers, had rushed from one to another, pulling and tearing until not a blossom was left, and then they had rushed off pelting each other with those great armfuls of fainting blossoms they had ravished.

“Which way did they go?” demanded Grey Sprite, who, as the Queen’s special knight, always attended her clothed in the Impenetrable Armor and carrying the Invincible Sword.

They all ran down Woodchuck’s hole, he was told, and had not come out again.

Drawing his flashing blade, Grey Sprite without a moment’s hesitation plunged in after them. As he hurried along, he could hear sounds of shouting and rude play, and a moment later came upon perhaps a dozen Gnomes, taking their ease in Woodchuck’s soft, warm nest.

As Grey Sprite appeared, they sprang to their feet, and drawing their arrows to

the head, hurled a volley at the intruder. When they saw their missiles glance harmlessly aside, and having nothing else with which to defend themselves, they fell upon their knees and begged piteously for their lives.

“It is not for me to judge you,” cried the Fairy. “Follow me, and we will see what the Queen will say to you.” As they reached the entrance of the hole, Grey Sprite called to the Fairies, and at his direction, each Gnome, as he came out, was seized and bound to the stem of a bush.

A Council was called, and the question raised as to what punishment should be given the marauders.

Almost every one urged that they should be killed, for their crime was worthy of a death sentence, but when the Queen turned to Grey Sprite, he was troubled.

“I hardly know what to say, Your Majesty. There is no question in my mind but that they should die, only it seems to



EACH GNOME WAS SEIZED AND BOUND TO THE STEM OF A  
BUSH.—*Page 132.*





me that we must look farther. Such an act will mean war at once between us and the Gnomes. Are we ready for this? Suppose they should prevail, think what would happen to the world if it came under their wicked spell! It seems to me that the best thing will be to imprison them for a while, and then do as seems best after more mature consideration."

The others demanded the instant execution of the murderers, but before any decision could be reached, there arose a great clamor, and out through the enveloping band of Fairies burst all the Gnomes, then with shrill cries they vanished from sight like a flurry of dead leaves before a sudden November gust. The grasses with which they had been bound were not strong enough to hold them, and they had all escaped!

This question being so abruptly settled, the Fairies set themselves to binding up the wounds and comforting as best they could

the desolate flowers, but nothing could bring back for another whole year the lovely blossoms that already were withered and dead.

South Wind came with a gentle rain and poured his cooling mist upon the feverish plants until he healed their gaping wounds, but nothing could bring back the happy laughter that was ringing through Wildwood such a short time ago, nor restore the beauty of which it had been so proud.

It was with heavy hearts that the Fairies sadly departed that night, and to Grey Sprite in particular came a great worry. He knew the story that the Gnomes would carry back, and could foresee trouble looming darkly ahead. But little did he realize how quickly it would come, or how deeply it would strike.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CAPTURE AND RESCUE OF WOODBINE

“**M**Y dear,” said the Queen, one beautiful June morning, as Woodbine was putting the finishing touches to her mistress’s hair, “you look tired, and need a rest. You may take this whole day to yourself, and do not let me see that pretty face again until it is time for you to put me to bed,” and smiling at her devoted little Hand-maid, she joined the group of attendants who were waiting to accompany her upon a visit she was making to the hive of the Honey-Bees, to settle a grievance they had against Field Mouse.

Left to her own devices, Woodbine sat down to plan what she would do with her unexpected freedom, and as she thought, a

great longing came over her to visit her old friends again, to spend the day picnicking in the woods where she had formerly lived. She had never been back since that eventful night when her beautiful design, woven on Old Pine's scraggly trunk, had won for them both the beauty prize, and they had been transformed into Fairies. To think was to act, and sending a messenger for Yellow Swallow-Tail, the Butterfly, she prepared for the trip.

"I am going home to spend the 'day,'" she said, as he came flying up, "and I want you to carry me there."

Swallow-Tail was very proud of being chosen for the trip, for Woodbine was a general favorite, and to have the chance of doing her a service was next best to doing one for the Queen herself.

She did not tell any one where she was going, and mounting upon her great butterfly's back, gave herself up to the pleasure of the ride.



Swallow-Tail needed no directions, for he knew well the locality to which they were going, and remembered how, during the month of preparations when every tree and bush in Wildwood was striving for the prize, this and that one would coax him to tell them how they looked and ask his advice, for he was a great beau, and was supposed to know many secrets about beauty preparations.

The rocking motion of his flight was so soothing that Woodbine could scarcely keep her eyes open as they floated along high up among the tree tops, but at last he cried, "Here we are," and gently touching the ground at the foot of Poplar-tree, allowed his passenger to alight.

Thanking him for the ride, Woodbine said, "Do not wait for me, for there is no telling how long I shall want to stay, and I can find some one to carry me home."

So off about his business flew the great butterfly, and he was so puffed up by the

honor he had received that he had to stop at every pretty bush and tell how Woodbine, the favorite of the Fairy Queen, had chosen him out of all those she might have had to carry her back to Wildwood.

You can imagine what a sensation the little Maid-of-Honor's visit caused among her old acquaintances, and she was so happy and excited that before she realized it, the afternoon was well advanced.

At last she came to where Miss Green Moss lived and sat herself down on the soft, cool cushion to chat awhile, but the temptation was too great, and curling up on the luxurious, fragrant couch, she said, "Green Moss, I am just going to take a little nap before I go home again."

Green Moss, proud beyond measure to have such a guest, said, "Sleep just as long as you like, and I will keep the bad bugs away from you."

So little Woodbine fell fast asleep and, of course, the time passed like magic.

Green Moss did not know whether to awaken her or not, but when it began to grow dark she decided to wait no longer, and coming softly to arouse her, found her gone.

It seemed very strange that Woodbine should have left without a word of good-by, and Green Moss felt a little hurt at this lack of courtesy.

"She might at least have said she was going," thought Green Moss, "and of course I was glad to have her enjoy my nice, soft bed; but that is the way great folk act, I suppose," and proceeded to make up the tumbled bed.

Later that night a Page was sent to find out why Woodbine was not in her accustomed place, for it was her special charge to prepare the Queen's hair when she retired at night. Presently he returned and reported that not only could he not find her, but that no one knew where she was.

This was such an unusual thing that



more messengers were sent in search, and each one, as they returned, reported that Woodbine was not in the castle, and that no one had seen her since she set out in the early morning mounted upon Yellow Swallow-Tail.

On hearing this, the Queen became greatly alarmed and sent for Grey Sprite. He had accompanied her on the journey, to the Honey-Bees, and had just laid aside his armor. Upon his arrival, the Queen told him of the strange disappearance of Woodbine and directed him to make up a searching party at once to find her.

“Hurry, Grey Sprite,” she called after him, “I shall not sleep a wink until you come back.”

His first act was to call the Leader of the Fireflies to him, and he ordered him to pass the word along to the whole band to drop everything they were doing and hunt for Woodbine.

In much less time than it takes to tell it,



thousands of little lights were flashing in every direction, and word was being spread to all the night moths and beetles whom they met to join the search.

In the meantime Grey Sprite had sent for Brown Moth and had started on a search for Swallow-Tail, thinking that by chance he might get a clew through him.

A friendly June Bug whom he met directed him to a thick bush where, snuggled close to the stalk, Yellow Swallow-Tail was deep in the mazes of Dream-Land. He had just started off on a wonderful voyage of discovery and on his back was seated the beautiful Woodbine, when he was rudely awakened by Grey Sprite's vigorous shaking and explosive questions.

Swallow-Tail was so upset and frightened that for several moments he could not get his wits to working, but at last he managed to tell what he knew, and away rushed Grey Sprite on his faithful moth for Wildwood.

Everything was quiet, and the trees and bushes were all in deep slumber, lulled by the soft, fragrant Zephyrs. Each as they awakened told the same story. Their pretty little comrade of former times had spent the 'day there, and they had seen her going to and fro among her acquaintances, but just when she had left and where she had gone, no one seemed to know.

Grey Sprite grew furious with anxiety, and summoning a band of Fireflies he ordered them to arouse every plant in the Glade and find out what they knew about it. As the reports began to come in, he listened with deepening concern, for each told exactly the same thing: they had seen her going about through the day but did not know what had become of her.

At last one of the searchers came to Green Moss, and after hearing her story, flew quickly to Grey Sprite with his report. The latter hastened to Green Moss, who

told how Woodbine had gone to sleep on her soft bed. Green Moss had several times, stolen softly to Woodbine's side to see that the Fairy was all right, but when she came to awaken Woodbine, she was gone, and Green Moss knew nothing about how or where she went, and none of her neighbors could tell anything about it.

Question her as he might, Grey Sprite could get nothing more from Green Moss, and as day was beginning to dawn, he flew back to the Court to plan a general search of the whole country.

Upon hearing his report, the Queen became very much alarmed and gave orders that every resource the Fairies possessed should be placed at Grey Sprite's disposal.

He called a conference at once, and soon an organized search had begun that would leave no blossom or leaf unquestioned, no insect or bird overlooked. Everything in the woods and fields would be asked, for some eye must have seen her.

Some one must know what had become of her.

Mounted upon Humming-Bird, the little Fairy kept in touch with everything, but always the same monotonous answer kept coming in. No one in all the world apparently had the slightest knowledge as to what had become of Woodbine.

The anxious day wore to a close, and as the shades of night began to steal abroad, the weary birds and insects one by one gave over their fruitless search, which was at once resumed by the creatures of the night, but when the great sun again shone over the world the puzzling question was no nearer solution than at the beginning.

Exhausted and overcome with grief, Grey Sprite had gone back to Wildwood, and throwing himself down upon the spot where Woodbine was last seen, gave way to violent grief. As he sobbed aloud, he was startled by an odd, little voice just be-



hind him, saying, "Why! Why! What on earth is the matter?"

Grey Sprite turned quickly about, astonished that there should be one creature left in the world who did not know the trouble, without being told, and saw Black Mole, with his head sticking out of a hole in the ground close beside him, peering at him with his funny little eyes.

"Have you not heard the terrible news?" Grey Sprite asked.

The Mole shook his head, "I am just up from my digging," said he, "and have heard nothing."

Whereupon Grey Sprite told him of the mysterious disappearance of Woodbine and the fruitless search over the whole world.

"You say it was late in the afternoon of two days ago that she was last seen, and at this very spot?" demanded Black Mole, beginning to look very excited.

“Yes,” replied Grey Sprite. “Tell me, do you know anything about it?”

“Perhaps that was what I saw,” said the Mole, scratching his ear thoughtfully. “You see I had just finished digging this very tunnel, and was coming out with my last load of dirt when I saw a band of Gnomes grouped about something just where you are sitting. They were all covered with the Mantle of Invisibility, but my eyes, you know, are different from those of other folks, and I could just dimly see them. I was so frightened that I did not try to find out what they were doing, but quietly backed into my hole without their hearing me, and I did not come out again till just now. I have been digging another tunnel in a new place, and that is why I have not heard anything about it before.”

At his words, Grey Sprite sprang to his feet, his face turning grey as ashes. “Oh, what a fool I am, not to have guessed it!”

he cried. "The Gnomes! The Gnomes! Oh, they have stolen her!" and calling loudly for Humming-Bird, he dashed away to tell the Queen and consult with the Keeper of the Ancient Jewel.

Consternation filled the hearts of all as they realized the terrible fate of Woodbine. Filled with fury at the loss of the Jewel, the Gnomes would show her no mercy, and sad laments were heard on all sides, for every one loved her.

Grey Sprite lost no time, and closeting himself with Faithful Guardian went carefully over the whole situation.

"They have her, of course, in the Mountain," said the latter, "and I am sure they have put her in a chamber that leads off from the treasure hall. I have known them to take prisoners in there many a time in the old days. How to get by the guards, and out again with her, that is the problem."

Grey Sprite sat lost in thought for some

little time. At length he said, "Let us consult the Ancient Jewel, and see for sure if they have her in that room." So kneeling before the Great Gem, he said, "O Starlight of the World, tell us, we pray thee, is Woodbine imprisoned in the chamber leading off from the treasure hall of the Gnomes?"

Instantly the Jewel glowed with its wondrous light, and they knew without the shadow of a doubt that Faithful Guardian had been right, and that the poor little Fairy was hidden deep in the dark recesses of the Mountain of the Gnomes.

"How can you ever get to her?" cried the Keeper of the Jewel, in despair.

"I have a plan," said Grey Sprite, "and I shall either succeed, or else they will have two Fairies to torture instead of one. Wish me success, Faithful Guardian," he cried, leaping to his feet, and hastened away to prepare for his journey.

At sight of his resolute face, the Queen



felt a ray of hope, and placing a hand on each of his shoulders, she said, "Bring her back with you, Grey Sprite, my Knight; I trust you."

Little did Woodbine dream, on that eventful afternoon when she lay down to nap on the fragrant bed of Green Moss, of the terrible calamity that was so near.

The Gnomes had been unable to lift the great trap-door that had swung into place when Grey Sprite and Old Toad, bearing the Ancient Jewel, had retreated into the latter's cave to escape the vengeance of Gold Stripe, and they had been ignorant of their loss until the news began to spread about the world that Grey Sprite, a Fairy of the Queen's Court, had rescued the wondrous Jewel from its captivity in the Mountain of the Gnomes and had brought it safely to the Court of the Fairy Queen, there to fulfill its mission in the world.

The rage of the King of the Gnomes

had been most terrible. Each of the guards at the different entrances, whom Grey Sprite had eluded, was put to death with frightful tortures, and Gold Stripe was confined in a dark dungeon, deep down in the Mountain, awaiting his fate. Bands of Gnomes were sent, concealed by the Mantle of Invisibility, to scout in the realms of Fairy-Land and spy out ways and means of taking vengeance, and it was one of these who, coming upon Woodbine sleeping in fancied security, had conceived the idea of spiriting her away to Gnome-Land. At the time they little dreamed of the importance of their capture, but were bent only on doing as much mischief as they could. They had made the journey, riding upon the back of a black-and-grey Butcher-Bird, and he was awaiting them not far away.

Deftly they slipped a gag into Woodbine's mouth and, bearing her aloft in their arms, despite her frantic struggles,

were soon beyond pursuit, flying back to Gnome-Land. Had it not been for the opportune arrival of Black Mole, no one would ever have known what had become of the Queen's favorite. When they arrived at the Mountain, she was locked in a dark cell and left till the following day, with no place to lay her head, and with nothing to eat.

Poor Woodbine was nearly frantic with fear, and when late on the following day, she heard footsteps approaching the door of her cell, she thought the end had come.

Abruptly the door was thrown open and without a word, two of those frightful-looking Gnomes belonging to the band that stood leering, seized her by the wrists and, dragging her along, finally stopped at a door in the wall. Knocking, they were admitted into a large hall that was entirely cased with pure gold; seated on a wondrously carved throne of the same precious material sat the King of the

Gnomes, surrounded by his soldiers. Dragging her up in front of him and hurling her upon the floor, the two stepped back and remained watching, their hands upon their swords.

For several terrible minutes, the King looked at her in silence, and then rasped out, "Who are you?"

"I am Woodbine, Handmaid of the Fairy Queen," she faltered, not daring to move or to lift her eyes.

At mention of her name, there was a stir of excitement among her soldiers, for the story of the prizes given that night in Wildwood had traveled far, and was known even to the Gnomes.

A sudden interest shone in the sullen eyes of the King.

"The Favorite of the Fairy Queen, and the friend of the robber who stole our Jewel," he muttered to a wise-looking old Gnome who stood close beside the throne. "I think I can soon see our burglar friend



in our toils, and perhaps the wonderful Fairy Queen," he sneered, "will be willing to pay a rare price for her two favorites. Take her away," said he to the guards; and turning to the grizzled old Sage by his side, he growled, "Guard her with your life; she will prove to be more precious to us than all our gold," and until the door closed between them, his gloating eyes never left her. Then calling the Captain of the Guards, he gave orders that the watchword for the hall of treasures, in which she was to be imprisoned should be changed to "Vengeance of the Gnomes."

Back in Fairy-Land, a brilliant Humming-Bird was flying swiftly through the air toward Wildwood, and on his back sat Grey Sprite, his gleaming armor hidden from sight by a dark mantle and cap. They were seeking Black Mole, and as they alighted at the entrance to his tunnel, they perceived his funny little eyes blinking at them from the dark opening.

"Mole," cried Grey Sprite, "how near the Mountain of the Gnomes do your tunnels go?"

"Almost to its base," answered he promptly.

"Woodbine is imprisoned in that terrible place," continued Grey Sprite, "will you take me there?"

"Gladly," answered the Mole, "you can count on me to the utmost; but what are you going to do after you get there?"

"I do not know yet," said Grey Sprite, "but some way will be found, I am sure."

So presently, lying safely concealed in the thick fur on Black Mole's back, the brave little Fairy was once more journeying back towards the Mountain of the Gnomes—and into peril; but Woodbine was a prisoner, perhaps suffering terrible tortures there, and no danger was great enough to prevent the Queen's Knight from attempting her rescue.

There was a great difference in the rate

of speed at which he was traveling compared with that to which Humming-Bird had accustomed him, but he bore the slow progress with the best patience he could, and tried to plan out his steps after he had reached the Mountain.

At length, after what seemed an eternity, he could see the light growing brighter and brighter as they neared the entrance to the tunnel, but cautious Black Mole said, "Now you stay hidden here while I look round a bit, and see how the land lies. The Gnomes are accustomed to seeing me come out anywhere, and will not suspect."

He was gone so long that Grey Sprite was on the point of venturing out to see what had become of him, when he heard the sound of hurrying feet, and a moment later Black Mole sank down beside him, panting heavily. It was some time before he could get breath enough to speak.

"Lucky for you that you stayed hid," he finally gasped. "This whole country is

filled with bands of armed Gnomes watching every avenue. They are evidently expecting you, and you would have been taken at once. I walked about, pretending to be looking for the location of a new tunnel, and they paid no attention to me. What in the world can you do now?" and the Mole settled back on his haunches, and gazed at his friend in the greatest anxiety.

"I have thought of a plan," said Grey Sprite. "Do you suppose you can find Chipmunk?"

"I am very sure I can," returned Black Mole, "he lives not far from here."

So away started the Mole again, and after a little while came back alone.

"I found him," he said, "and have told him all about it. He is anxious to help, for the Gnomes spoil his nuts whenever they find them. They bore holes in them, and put in maggots. When Chipmunk comes later to have a meal, he finds them all spoiled. We thought it best not to



come together for fear the Gnomes might suspect something. Ah, here he comes now," and a moment later Chipmunk snuggled down beside them.

Grey Sprite welcomed him, and then told him all about the case.

"Do you suppose," asked he, "that you could carry me, so that I would not be seen, in the pocket on the side of your mouth?"

"Surely I can," replied Chipmunk, with a waggish look at Black Mole, "that's the way I carry nuts," and he giggled all over. Nothing was ever serious enough to suppress Chipmunk entirely.

"Good," said Grey Sprite. "Now this is my plan. You will carry me, concealed in your pouch, to a spot I shall show you up on the Mountain side, and there bury me in the ground just as you do your nuts, except that you will cover me with leaves. I will attend to the rest."

Black Mole looked on with great interest as Chipmunk stowed the little Fairy

away in his roomy pouch, and clapped his paws in approval. "They will never suspect you in the world," he declared.

Out from the tunnel scampered the friendly Chipmunk, dodging about here and there as though concerned only with his usual daily toil, and Grey Sprite, peering out through the half-opened mouth, could see hundreds of Gnomes heavily armed and scattered in bands all about the Mountain. He realized how little chance he would have had should he have tried any other method of approach, and trembled with apprehension when once Chipmunk audaciously pounced upon a nut close beside one of the band, but they paid no attention to him, save that the leader jeeringly called after him, "Hide it safely, or we will put a boarder in it for you," and Chipmunk, as though in sudden panic, fled up the Mountain-side, his tail straight up in the air.

"Stop by that rock just ahead," whis-

pered Grey Sprite, "and dig a shallow hole. Now, lay me in it, and cover me all over with leaves. Come back again every hour as though to bury your nuts, and if I succeed, you will find me here waiting for you with Woodbine. Then carry us both back to Black Mole. I don't know how long I shall be, but keep a good lookout for us."

So Chipmunk did as he was told, and then scampered away to find some more nuts, but he kept an anxious eye cocked in the direction of his friend, for he was terribly worried lest some meddlesome Gnome should take it into his head to dig into his store and spoil all their plans.

Everything went well, however, and as it began to grow dark, Grey Sprite whispered to Chipmunk to go and rest for the night, but to be on hand first thing in the morning.

The fissure in the mountain side through which he and Blind Toad had made their

escape on a former occasion was not far from where he was buried, and he believed that, except to him and his former companion, it was known to none. He did not think it wise even to allow Chipmunk to learn of its whereabouts, and the latter went away with no knowledge of Grey Sprite's further plans.

Soon all was dark and quiet. In the distance, from time to time, he could hear Whip-poor-will, and once Great Owl's ceaseless query echoed from hill to hill. Although they could give him no assistance, yet it comforted him to hear their friendly voices, helped to steady his nerves for the desperate venture he was about to make, for he had determined to enter again the treasure hall of the Gnomes, and this time he would have no friendly password to vouch for him.

When he thought it safe to move, he carefully pushed aside the leaves which covered him, and looked about. There



was no moon, and it was so dark that he could see nothing, but he knew that the Gnomes could see, and so did not venture to stand up. Wriggling along on his stomach like a snake, stopping every little while to listen, he soon reached the stone with which he had formerly closed the fissure that led into the Mountain. Apparently it had not been disturbed since he had placed it there, and after one more careful survey, he noiselessly pushed it to one side and slipped within. Reaching up with both hands, he worked it back into the same position as it was before, and turning, began to grope his way up the winding path.

His attention was immediately attracted by the sound of blows—ringing sounds, like metal striking against rock—and he knew that it must be the Gnomes at work all through the Mountain digging their gold. With their sharp ears he knew they could at once detect any strange sound,

and an investigation would mean disaster for his plans. So with renewed caution, he stole forward, feeling his way before him with cautious hand and foot.

The traveling was vastly more difficult, for this time there was no friendly light from the Ancient Jewel to guide him—only the sense of touch. Presently he came to a division in the path, and he stopped, perplexed as to which turn to take. Deciding upon that to the right, he again slowly advanced and had just begun to feel a sense of relief when his outstretched hand passed into vacancy, and he barely caught himself from falling.

Leaning forward, he tried vainly to pierce the gloom. Had he reached the cave of Old Toad? If so, he had only to jump down a few feet and stand on its floor. Grey Sprite had just decided to make the attempt when instinctive caution made him pause, and groping about until he found a tiny pebble he cast it into the

darkness before him, listening for the sound of its fall. A second past, and then faintly in the distance he heard it strike; he drew back sick for the moment at the thought. Suppose he had jumped!

Evidently he had selected the wrong passage. Retracing his steps, he groped his way back to where the path had divided, and taking the other division, pushed slowly ahead once more.

Soon he came to a rock that he remembered moving on his previous trip, and he went ahead with renewed confidence.

When he again felt an edge to the wall, he tested the darkness as before, and immediately hearing the pebble strike on the floor, he jumped lightly down and stood once more in the retreat of Old Toad.

For some little time he rested and listened for sounds in the room above him. Hearing nothing, he prepared for action by taking off his belt and scabbard, and holding the naked sword in one hand, care-

fully pushed on the spring that Faithful Guardian had described to him.

At once the heavy stone door in the roof began noiselessly to swing up, and checking it as soon as there was room for him to crawl out, he looked eagerly into the great hall.

Gone was the wonderful, mellow light that had formerly illumined it. The end where he stood was in deep gloom, but at the far entrance opposite, was light, and by it he could make out a band of ten Gnomes, all facing the door.

Gathering the dark concealing mantle closely about him, Grey Sprite silently climbed out into the hall and stole towards them. Step by step he advanced until he was very close, then creeping behind a great bag of gold, he crouched, waiting to see what would turn up, and hoping to learn where Woodbine was hid.

A long time passed, the Gnomes never moved a step, but stood with their weapons



ready, watching with utmost vigilance the great door that closed the entrance.

Presently Grey Sprite saw them stiffen to more acute attention, and the bows came up into position.

Two knocks, followed shortly after by three short ones, sounded on the door.

At once the leader of the band threw it open, and like one voice the horrid scream rang out, that, even hidden as he was, sent cold shivers running down Grey Sprite's back. "The Password!" they cried, and two attendants standing there with food and drink in their hands, answered, "Vengeance!"

Springing in front of the band and swinging his sword high, the Leader cried, "Of whom?" "The Gnomes," they answered.

At the words, the weapons were lowered, and placing himself before them, the Leader passed across the hall. Then knocking twice upon a certain spot on the

wall, a door swung open noiselessly, and as silently shut behind them as the two attendants passed within. The Leader never stirred until after a short time it again swung open, when he escorted the servants back, and passing them into the outer hall closed and fastened the door.

“Was there ever such fortune!” thought Grey Sprite. He had not only the location of the door which he felt sure led to the room where Woodbine was imprisoned, but also the signal that opened it. Now was the time for action, and, casting aside the dark cloak, he passed with one leap through the band and stood facing them, his back to the door.

For a moment they stared in amazement; then against the impenetrable Armor in which he was clothed rang ten arrows. When they saw these glance harmlessly aside, they drew their swords, and rushed upon him.

But they had “reckoned without their

host," for their ten swords were instantly engaged by a silvery gleam of lightning as the Invincible Sword flashed and played about them. At every thrust, a Gnome fell lifeless to the floor. The fight was won and over before it had hardly started, and Grey Sprite could scarcely believe his senses as he gazed in amazement at the silent forms piled in a grotesque heap before him.

Not a sound had been uttered during the engagement, and placing his ear to the door, he listened fearfully for signs of discovery. All was as silent as the grave.

Reassured, he sped across the hall, and knocked twice upon the concealed door. As before, it swung open silently and as he leaped within, closed tightly behind him. He paid little heed to this, however, for his attention was riveted upon a sight that for a moment stiffened him in astonishment. There, facing him, with his baleful eyes gleaming in sudden hatred,

and the great, poisonous mouth working ferociously, stood his old enemy, Gold Stripe, poised and ready to spring.

“Guard her with your life!” was the command of the King of the Gnomes, when he placed Woodbine in charge of his old Councilor, and the latter, well knowing the pitiless nature of his Master, followed his prisoner and her guards with a troubled mind.

Never before had such a beautiful creature as Woodbine been seen in the Mountain, and the wily old Councilor, deeply versed in the promptings of the heart, distrusted the guards upon whom he would have to depend. To give up all his own time to watch over her was out of the question, and with his life at stake, he hesitated to trust the alternative. Suddenly he thought of a prisoner deep down in the dungeons of the Mountain awaiting death from torture—Gold Stripe, the Spider, who betrayed the secret of the Gnomes.



With pardon awaiting his faithful performance of duty, who else could be so trustworthy, especially when the prisoner whom he would have to watch was beloved by his bitter and hated enemy, Grey Sprite?

So presently a door was opened in a dark, cold dungeon, and the cringing spider saw before him the soldiers who he supposed had come to take him to his death. No word was spoken, but he was jostled along until at length he stood before Old Councilor.

The latter looked scornfully at him for several minutes, then "Traitor, what price will you pay for your life?" he suddenly demanded. "Alas, I have nothing of value to offer," said Gold Stripe, who thought this only meant that his death sentence was coming.

At his gesture, the Guards withdrew, and Old Councilor, closing the door, said, "You are worthy of nothing but the

cruelest death, and until now this was decreed against you. But a circumstance has arisen which inclines me to offer you a chance for your life."

At this ray of hope, Gold Stripe sank to the floor almost fainting, while Old Councilor explained about the capture of Woodbine and the need of a faithful jailor. He also enlarged upon the certainty of Grey Sprite's capture, for none could doubt that he would undertake a rescue, which would speedily land him in their hands.

Hate urging him on, more than the promise even of life, brought the great Spider to his feet in eager assurance of his fidelity, and so it happened that after seeking his enemy vainly over all the world, Grey Sprite should unexpectedly meet him here, the jailor of his beloved Woodbine.

For a moment neither stirred, then, like a flash, Grey Sprite sprang at him, the Invincible Sword gleaming in his hand.

Had it been a Gnome who faced him, the fight would have lasted but a second, but Gold Stripe was the craftiest of the crafty, and swiftly as Grey Sprite leaped, the great spider was even swifter, and jumping high over his head, threw a noose of sticky web at him.

Avoiding it, Grey Sprite rushed in again, only to find the spider out of reach and casting off web in every direction. Some of the ends caught on the wall, each a treacherous snare, and rushing swiftly about, warily evading every attack, Gold Stripe began to fill the room with his sticky trap.

Once the Spider ventured too close, and like a lightning stroke the sword lopped off one of his legs. This did not seem to trouble him very much, but he took good care not to get so near again.

The pace was beginning to tell fearfully upon Grey Sprite, weighted as he was with his armor, and as his breath began to come

in great, sobbing gasps he realized that he must husband his strength. So he backed cautiously against the wall, the Invincible Sword holding the exulting enemy at bay.

By this time Gold Stripe had nearly filled the room with his deadly web, and making a sudden dash at Grey Sprite tempted the latter to attack again. As he did so, he felt a noose tighten about his ankle, and before he could release it, was jerked into the air and fell heavily upon the floor his sword flying from his hand.

Like a flash, Gold Stripe was upon him, biting ferociously, but the Impenetrable Armor was more than a match for his teeth, and realizing that he could not harm his enemy in that manner, he raised the poor little Fairy high in his hairy arms to dash him to death, when suddenly he collapsed, and with a great shudder sank upon the floor.

Grey Sprite, half stunned by his fall,



staggered dizzily to his feet. His first thought was to regain his sword, and as his gaze swept the room, he beheld Woodbine standing behind them, pale and trembling like a leaf.

Not realizing that the fight was over, he looked for his sword, but could see it nowhere. "My sword, oh, where is my sword?" he cried, in an agony of despair.

Woodbine, unable to speak, could only point to the dead Spider. There driven to the hilt in his great body rested the Invincible Sword.

At the first sound of the combat, she had stolen to the door, and fascinated with horror had watched the deadly fight. As Grey Sprite fell, the blade flying across the room had dropped at her feet. Instantly she had snatched it up and, as Gold Stripe tensed all his great muscles to dash Grey Sprite upon the stony floor, she had driven it with her utmost strength into the mighty exposed back, and the Invincible

Sword had found once more its favorite resting-place: the heart of its foe.

"You have saved us!" cried Grey Sprite, "Oh you plucky little Fairy!" and for several blissful moments all the Gnomes in the Mountain could have hammered at the door unheard.

"I knew you would come," said Woodbine. "Had it not been for that, I should have died from fright."

"This will never do," said Grey Sprite, for their danger was too real to be long forgotten. "We must get out of here just as quickly as we possibly can. Hurry over to that trap-door at the end of the Hall, and wait for me; I shall not be long."

"Oh, do not leave me!" cried Woodbine, her fears returning at the thought of being left alone again in that terrible place.

"Remember," said Grey Sprite; "the Gnomes must never know, if I can prevent it, how I got into this place. I am going to leave the outer door ajar, and they will

think we escaped through that entrance. There is no danger where you are going."

Without another word, Woodbine hastened toward the trap-door, while Grey Sprite, tiptoeing to the door, listened intently for several minutes. Convinced at last that no one was hiding behind, he opened it and leaving it ajar, sped back to the entrance of the abode of Old Toad.

Jumping in, he swung Woodbine lightly to the floor, while, yielding to his touch, the heavy slab settled back into its place.

The sudden darkness was intense, but the sound of the steady tap, tap, tap, all over the Mountain was reassuring, and Grey Sprite knew that as yet no alarm had been sent out.

Taking Woodbine by the hand, he guided her carefully to the crevice in the wall. "Hold fast to my belt," he said, "and make no noise, for the least sound will be heard."

With infinite caution they felt their way along the rough and twisting passage, and were about half-way out, when the sounds of digging suddenly ceased, and Grey Sprite knew that the ghastly heap at the entrance to the door had been discovered. But of this he said not a word to Woodbine.

It was with many misgivings that they approached the outer world. Suppose something had happened to Chipmunk. How could they ever hope to win through the hordes of Gnomes who would be watching with increased vigilance?

When they reached the stone at the entrance, they listened for a long time for sounds of danger, but at length, feeling quite sure that none of their enemies were about, Grey Sprite pushed aside the stone, and crawling out, looked fearfully in every direction.

It was still night and he could see nothing. Helping Woodbine out, he care-



fully replaced the stone, removing every mark and trace of their presence.

The next thing to do was to bury themselves with leaves in the hole that Chipmunk had dug for them, and they had just begun to crawl towards it when each was suddenly seized by a great foot and carried swiftly up into a tall tree.

“Who! Who!” cried Great Owl, for it was he who had captured them, “I wonder what these things are, and if they are good to eat?”

“Greetings, Great Owl,” cried Grey Sprite joyously, as he recognized his old friend, “your memory is certainly getting poor.”

“Of all things,” cried the great bird in amazement, “Old Pine, as I live.”

“Yes, and Miss Woodbine, too, if you please,” cried the other little Fairy.

In a few words, Grey Sprite told his story, and Great Owl chuckled till his sides shook.

“Oh, what a joke,” he kept repeating over and over again.

The Fairies could not see any joke, but they were well contented to be with their friend, Great Owl, high up in the great tree.

At last when they could settle down to business again, Grey Sprite asked his friend, Great Owl, if he could carry them back to the Court.

“I am very sorry,” he answered, “but I have a very important engagement that will prevent my going back all the way. But I will see you safely as far as Black Mole, and I can pass the news along to Chipmunk.”

So safely buried from sight in the thick, soft feathers on Great Owl’s back, they were wafted through the night, and presently, having bidden farewell to their preserver, they peered into the dark tunnel which Black Mole had dug, and softly called his name.



GREAT OWL CHUCKLED UNTIL HIS SIDES SHOOK.—Page 177.





Immediately they heard a scratching, out popped the sharp little nose, and they saw his tiny eyes blinking at them. "Well, I do declare! Well, I do declare!" was all he could say, as he bustled round and round them.

"All right, Black Mole," laughed Grey Sprite, "but let us be going; I shall not feel safe until I see the sun shining at the Fairy Court."

"Get right up on my back then," returned the Mole, "and hang on tight. I am going to break my speed limit," and away he tore at what was for him a furious pace.

Words cannot describe the wild enthusiasm that greeted our adventurers, when, at length, seated upon Humming-Bird's gleaming back, they arrived at the wonderful castle where the Fairy Queen lived in state, and which was now the abode of the Ancient Jewel. From there the news was wafted in every direction by the

Zephyrs, and the good tidings were spread from one to another until all the world knew that Woodbine, the well-beloved Handmaid of the Fairy Queen, had been rescued from the Gnomes by Grey Sprite.

Wise ones shook their heads in anxiety, for by now the news must have traveled to the Gnomes themselves, and their vindictive and terrible natures were well known.

At the Court, these misgivings were shared only by Grey Sprite himself and Faithful Guardian, as they went carefully over the whole story of the rescue, for to him alone had Grey Sprite revealed the manner in which the rescue had been accomplished.

Black Mole and Chipmunk were summoned to Court, and were duly rewarded for their share in the adventure, both being taken under the Fairy Queen's special protection and changed into Fairies, for they could never go back to their former

lives again, on account of the Gnomes.

To all the race of Chipmunks was given, in honor of the event, some beautiful stripes on their backs, and to the Moles a wonderful star, to be worn forever on their noses; and it was made soft and flexible so as not to interfere with their digging. Great Owl was also remembered, but he disdained the thought of being afraid of the Gnomes, and only asked that he might have a fine tuft of feathers like ears to wear on each side of his head.

The Fairies, in their intoxication of joy, would have given themselves up to endless revels, but Grey Sprite realized too well the vindictive nature of their enemies, and knew that even now the Gnomes were plotting some terrible vengeance.

So he requested an audience with the Queen and begged that she call a council of war at once. "For," said he, "and Faithful Guardian agrees with me, there

will be no more peace and safety in the world until the power of the Gnomes is forever broken.”

The council was held in the great hall of the Castle, and it was decided to wage a war to the death with the Gnomes, and Grey Sprite, being chosen commander, stood up in his place and cried, “The Gnomes must be destroyed!” When the cheers had subsided, he added, “And we will strike the first blow.”

Thus began the terrible war between the Fairies and the Gnomes, but I will tell you of that some other time.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE WAR OF THE FAIRIES AND THE GNOMES

**T**O the four corners of the earth on the wings of the Winds went the call to the colors for all loyal Fairies, and just as tiny rills merge into streams and they in turn increase to rivers, so from every direction came the great army of Fairies to gather about the Castle where dwelt the Queen.

Everywhere were scenes of bustle and confusion. The smoke from a thousand forges darkened the air, and from morning till night the steady clank, clank, clank of hammers was heard, as the Smiths toiled incessantly, forging heads for arrows and lances and sharp swords.

Grey Sprite was busy all day and far

into the night. The Fairies had to be organized into easily handled units, and there was constant drilling on the level plain in front of the Castle. Then there was the important question as to food for such an army.

This latter problem was placed in the hands of the Queen of the Ants, and for miles around, millions of these little creatures were scouring and combing the country, while as a result of their efforts an immense heap of food began to pile up.

The Queen of the Bees was also called upon, and for a while all her subjects devoted their time to collecting honey and bread to swell the commissary.

One of the important questions that came up for discussion was transportation, and finally, as it happened to be in the late summer that these events were transpiring, it was decided to engage the Blackbirds (who were everywhere assembling in countless numbers for their fall moving)

to carry the army to Gnome-Land. It was also decided to make use of the big, strong crows to bear the supplies that would be needed.

One fine morning, Grey Sprite, standing on the central tower of the Castle, pulled the cords that held it, and out to the breeze floated the jeweled standard of the Fairy Queen!

As the banner gave itself to the caressing wind, up from the plain below, with a roar of beating wings that sounded like thunder rose the first division of the Black-birds, and on each bird sat two Fairies, the points of their weapons twinkling like stars. This was followed, as soon as it was well under way, by a second; and they by a third; and so on until all were in the air, flying swiftly and steadily towards the west—and Gnome-Land. Next, the great caravan of Crows took flight, following close upon their lighter brothers. The army was off, and who had wisdom to

foretell the outcome of the strife to be!

Standing apart from the others, the Queen, Woodbine, and Grey Sprite watched the departure with beating hearts, and a proud look shone in the Queen's eyes as she saw the great array of loyal subjects that had rushed to her aid.

There was no pride in Woodbine's eyes, however, and they were swollen and red from weeping, for she well realized the terrible conflict that was coming. She had seen enough of the Gnomes during her stay at the Mountain to fill her with dread of their power and cunning.

Upon Grey's Sprite's helmet was wound a bright scarf, and as the Queen looked at it, she smiled tenderly upon her two favorites, and remarking that she had forgotten to ask her Dressmaker something, passed over to where the rest of the Castle defenders were watching, and left them alone.

"Dry those tears, Woodbine," said Grey



Sprite, "we are all coming back in triumph, and never again will there be anything to make us afraid."

"I know the Ancient Jewel says you will be successful, but it also says that you will be changed, and I fear something terrible is going to happen to you."

"Nothing can happen to one who is loved by such as you," said he tenderly. "Keep up a brave heart, and soon you will see us coming back in triumph to you."

With a last farewell to his friends and a strict order to the Captain of the Guards to keep ceaseless watch, Grey Sprite seated himself upon Humming-Bird, and dashed away to take his place at the head of the great, black cloud that was rapidly vanishing towards the west.

Day by day they flew steadily and swiftly. Early in the afternoon the Birds would alight, and when their burdens were removed, would stream away in all directions, foraging for their supper while

the Fairies, making camp, would prepare for their night's rest.

Before the sun arose could be heard the roar of wings and the hoarse cries of the Blackbirds as again they hurried off to get the meal that must last them through the day's journey. Then by early forenoon the great multitude would be on its way again, and the shadow that they would cast on the landscape, as for hours they passed by high in the heavens, made people think that night was coming.

They made such rapid progress that soon they were approaching the Land of the Gnomes, and one afternoon, just as they were beginning to think about the night's camp, Grey Sprite saw in the distance the Mountain of his adventures.

That night he held a great council of war and arranged his plans. Out of the bravest of his warriors he selected a special band of about 500 with whom he intended, provided the way were still open,

to enter the Mountain by the crevice that the earthquake had made, and then, if successful, to hold the treasure hall until enough of his forces could get in to take the place. The only other way, unless the Gnomes should come out and fight in the open, would be to starve them out, and no one could say how large a store of provisions they might have, nor how long it might take.

As soon as possible the next morning, the start was made. As they flew swiftly forward, the Mountain loomed greater and greater, until at length it reared its lofty head directly before them. Darting down to where the brook came tumbling out from its side, Humming-Bird alighted, and round about him in a vast circle settled the Blackbirds.

As they had approached the Mountain, Grey Sprite and Humming-Bird had watched narrowly for bands of Gnomes, but not a single one had they seen. Ap-

parently the advance of the Fairies had not been discovered.

Leaving the General, whom he had chosen to take command in his absence, to arrange the camp and prepare for the siege should it become necessary, Grey Sprite with his chosen band made his way quickly to the crevice in the Mountain side.

He found the rock that covered it undisturbed, and pushing it aside, slipped within, followed by a large number of Fireflies whom he had brought to light the unfamiliar path for his soldiers.

Pushing ahead alone with his Torchbearers, he was soon in the familiar cave of Blind Toad, and reaching way back to the entrance was a bright light at every turn in the path.

With their armor covered by heavy cloaks to deaden the noise of their progress, the 500 crept stealthily along until



the room was filled with armed soldiers of the Queen.

Before any of them had arrived, Grey Sprite had satisfied himself, as far as he could by listening, that the great hall was empty. He pushed upon the spring. The massive stone rose noiselessly above them, and the Fairies as silently drew themselves up on to the floor.

All was very dark except down by the door where shone a dim light, and stealing towards it, they saw a guard sound asleep at his post.

A moment later when he awoke, he found himself a prisoner, and the threatening swords dispelled any desire that he may have had to make an outcry.

"Lead me to your King," said Grey Sprite sternly, "and I will spare your life."

Nearly fainting from fear, the poor Gnome could only obey, and supported on each side by a sturdy Fairy, he guided them

through the maze of passages until at length they came to a door.

Inside could be heard the sound of loud voices in a fierce wrangle, and cautiously opening the door a crack, Grey Sprite peeked through.

There, seated on his golden throne, sat the King of the Gnomes, in all his grandeur. From the top of the wondrously wrought crown upon his head gleamed the dull light of a great uncut emerald. The room was half filled with what appeared to be Nobles, judging from their rich garments.

As Grey Sprite listened, he heard the King say, "Now since we have settled the division of the land and you are all agreed, we will dispose of the prisoners we shall take. First of all the Fairy Queen; I claim her as mine; also her Handmaid, Woodbine."

Upon this there arose a loud dispute, for the others seemed to think that the Queen

was enough for their King to have, and each of them was determined to have Woodbine, whose fame for beauty had spread far and wide.

As Grey Sprite caught the nature of the discussion, his face flamed with fury, and throwing wide the door, he cried with a terrible voice, "And I will have you all!"

Unnerved by the fierce cry and the gleaming swords that instantly filled the room, the Nobles made no resistance and were quickly secured, while Grey Sprite, advancing upon the King, demanded that he give himself up at once, along with his whole army.

For a moment the King stared at the apparition before him with widely dilated eyes, then without a word his cheeks grew ashy, and tottering from his seat, he plunged lifeless to the floor.

As he fell, the great crown dropped from his head and Grey Sprite, moved by a sudden impulse that he could not help,

caught it as it fell, and straightening to his full height, placed it upon his own head.

Instantly every Gnome in the room sank upon his knees, and from every throat rang out the cry, "Hail, King of the Gnomes!"

He had unwittingly carried out a custom as old as the Gnomes themselves, and had crowned himself their King.

For a moment Grey Sprite stood as though thunder-struck. He had acted upon an sudden impulse with no idea whatever as to what would result from it, and as the possible meaning of the Gnomes' act flashed through his mind, he turned an inquiring glance upon Old Councilor who was kneeling at his feet.

The wise old Gnome realized the situation, but there was no undoing it, and placing Grey Sprite's hand upon his forehead in token of submission, Old Councilor said, in a firm voice, "I am thy servant, faithful and devoted, and I pray, O Mas-



ter, that you will deal more kindly with me than did he who lies dead there upon the floor." Then reaching down, he drew the curiously carved signet ring from the nerveless hand, and slipped it upon Grey Sprite's finger.

"Loose your brothers," the Fairy Leader called to his soldiers, "there is no more enmity between the Fairies and the Gnomes."

Immediately the rest of the Nobles crowded about him, and in the same manner, as did Old Councilor, pledged obedience to the new King while all the time the Soldiers of the Queen looked on in amazement.

"Call hither the Leaders of your Army," said Grey Sprite to Old Councilor, and turning to the Captain of his own Guards, he directed him to summon the Queen's Generals.

At his words, a look of consternation swept over the face of the Gnome. "The

Army," he gasped, "left the Mountain a week ago to launch a great attack against the Fairies. It must by this time be well advanced into Fairy-Land," and wringing his hands in despair, he looked anxiously into the face of his new King.

Grey Sprite's face turned as death-like as that of him who lay upon the floor at his feet.

"How did they travel?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, and it seemed to the trembling Gnome as if the burning eyes must scorch him.

"Upon a great flight of Bats, Your Majesty," he answered.

At the words, a ray of hope filtered through upon the blackness of Grey Sprite's despair. "In what time did they expect to make the journey?" he cried.

"About ten days, Majesty," returned the Noble.

Like a flash, Grey Sprite turned to the Captain of his Guards, "You," said he,

“will take command here until further orders come from me.” And turning to Old Councilor, he cried, “Conduct me to the outer gate.”

Twisting and turning through the devious passages of the Mountain, the pair hastened, and soon they passed under the rim of rock that the brook had cut from the wall of the Mountain and stood among the Fairies.

A shout of amazement went up as the Soldiers crowded about him, but paying attention to none, Grey Sprite called loudly for the General whom he had left in charge.

“I have taken the Mountain,” he cried, “The Gnome King is dead. Peace is declared. The Gnome Army passed us in the night, and are within three days’ flight of the Castle. Bring your forces back with all haste. I shall precede you,” and motioning to Humming-Bird, who had dashed up on hearing his voice, he di-

rected Old Councilor to mount upon his back. Then vaulting lightly up beside him, called to Humming-Bird, "Oh, speed, Faithful Friend!"

Before the wondering circle had fairly sensed his words, he was but a vanishing speck in the distance.

"How are we going to manage?" asked Humming-Bird. "I cannot keep up this pace very long with you both upon my back."

The day was well advanced, and Grey Sprite knew that soon the Night Hawks would be starting out from their resting-places, so he told Humming-Bird to watch out for them.

Presently a flock of about a dozen was seen high in the air, and as they approached them, two of their number plunged almost to the ground from their dizzy height, then as they turned to rise, a deep, booming sound filled all the air.

"Night Hawks," called Grey Sprite,



and as they wheeled at his call and swung up on the wind towards him, he continued, "on the Queen of the Fairies' service, summon your whole flock."

Quickly the flock of Night Hawks swept up, and in a few words Grey Sprite told them of the Queen's peril and the need of extreme haste. He and the Old Gnome seated themselves on the back of the first Hawk.

"I think you had all better follow along," said he, "and when the bearers begin to tire, we can change."

So away once more they darted ever towards the east, while the wistful eyes of Humming-Bird followed them until they faded away in the deepening twilight.

The motion of the Hawks was very soothing, and its noiselessness gave them the impression that they were not making as rapid progress as before, but Night Hawk assured them that he was going as fast as he could. For hours they glided

through the night. All below them, as they looked down, was inky blackness, but overhead the friendly stars shone with their serene light. Long before midnight, Grey Sprite realized that his bird was wearying, so telling him to stop, they changed to a fresh Hawk, and again were traveling at top speed. Once more before the pink dawn began to tint the eastern horizon, a change was made to a fresh mount, and when daylight finally burst upon the world, they realized that many, many leagues had been put behind them by these graceful birds.

Presently as they swept along, Grey Sprite saw a huge, black bird with snowy head and tail soar leisurely up from the woods and start off in a long, spiral climb into the heavens.

“Get him, Night Hawk,” said he, “there is our mount for this whole day.” When a little later they got within calling distance, he cried, “Service of the Fairy

Queen, Eagle. She is in dire need of help, and I want you to carry my friend and myself as fast and as far as you can this day."

With a graceful turn, the Eagle plunged like an arrow towards the earth far below, while Night Hawk, not to be outdone, executed just as successful a dive, and brought up with a loud boom as he turned to avoid hitting the ground.

The exchange was quickly made, and Grey Sprite gave a great sigh of satisfaction as he felt the powerful lift of the mighty wings driving them ahead at first ever upwards in long spirals and then with a sweep like the North Wind, the Eagle settled to his pace.

As they swept along, Old Councilor told Grey Sprite about the kingdom he was to rule, describing the habits and customs of the Gnomes. He spoke of the people themselves, of the Nobles, and how the Army was governed and maintained,

thus whiling away the terrible monotony of the day, and helping to divert his mind for a little while from the deadly worry that was gnawing into the heart of his courage.

Far below them could be seen hills and woods that Grey Sprite recognized, and he knew that they were within the borders of Fairy-Land, but he also realized with a sinking heart that at least another day and night's journey lay between him and the Castle.

All day the great Eagle flew at top speed, but late in the afternoon, Grey Sprite felt with sudden dismay that the Bird was slowing down, and he could feel a vibration over the whole body as his mighty heart began to pound with the exertion.

"This will never do, Eagle," he cried, "Stop and rest. We must try to find some one to spell you. Have you any one to suggest?"

The Eagle gratefully circled down and



alighted on the top of a dead tree. After a few minutes he caught his breath enough to gasp, "The Old Grey Gander of the Wild Geese. He can take you the rest of the way without stopping; and no one can go faster."

"But where can we find him?" asked Grey Sprite anxiously.

"Just as soon as I can get my wind," said Eagle, "I will take you to him. I know where he has been resting these last two days."

Presently, flapping his broad wings, he flew across to where a little lake nestled among the hills, and there taking their ease floated the Wild Geese, with Old Gander standing upon a rock that showed above the water, his head tucked under his wing, fast asleep. As the great Eagle swept into view, one of the Geese gave a warning honk, and instantly all were watching alertly.

Alighting upon the rock, Grey Sprite

told his errand and the deadly peril of the Queen, and Old Gander cried, "I guess I was resting up for this very trip. Climb upon my back, and I will have you there by to-morrow forenoon."

Thanking Eagle for his help, they quickly obeyed, and hung on for dear life, while Old Gander plowed his way up into the air. He rose steadily, although not in the same manner as did Eagle, until they were so high that the earth below looked like a strange planet. Then with his great neck held straight out before him, he forged ahead, and Grey Sprite moaned, "Oh, why didn't I have him all the time!"

Ever and again the Old Gander would sound his challenging trumpet call, and many, hearing it, would look up and wonder where he was going all alone, little guessing that he carried on his back the fate of the Fairy Queen and all her Court.

As they settled themselves for the long trip, Grey Sprite became alarmed at the

appearance of Old Councilor. Lack of sleep and food was telling heavily upon the aged Gnome, so he told him to burrow into the soft down that grew thickly upon Old Gander's back and sleep, while he would keep watch and see that he did not fall off.

Wearily the Old Gnome did as he was told, and Grey Sprite was left alone with his thoughts.

Below, the shadows of evening began again to gather over the world, and soon all he could see was the shining stars, for there was no moon. He marveled at the wonderful staying power of the great bird. Never for a moment did the mighty wings falter in their beat, and the challenge of his call was as clear as when they started. Then he began to wonder at the strange fortune that had followed him ever since the loving, little Vine had woven her delicate embroidery over his scarred and blackened trunk, and his heart ached with

the great love it held for her. He longed for the moment when he should see her again.

All at once he heard Old Gander grunt, "The Fairy Castle!" and rubbing his eyes, he realized that for hours he had been soundly sleeping and that Old Gander had kept his promise.

. . . . .

Although the departure of the Army and all the gay officers made quite a difference in the daily life of the Court, yet there was so much to do that time passed quickly.

Woodbine took charge of the bandage and surgical dressing supplies and had a great corps of Fairy Girls winding and folding with feverish haste from morning to night. Each day a large supply of these was started towards the Front on the backs of the willing Crows.



On the hill behind the Castle where the Pine-trees filled the air with their healing balm, a splendid Hospital was being erected, for none who knew anything of the fierceness of the Gnomes could doubt but that it would be sorely needed before the terrible campaign was ended.

One thing worried Woodbine ceaselessly—the Ancient Jewel had in answer to a question assured them that Grey Sprite would return, but that he would not be the same; and although she trusted his love as she did her own life, yet the puzzle was always in her mind; what did it mean? Every afternoon she would leave her busy maidens and, stationing herself on the high turret of the Castle, watch for the messenger that Grey Sprite had promised to send to her each day, and her heart would quicken when suddenly she would spy the little speck far in the distance coming straight for the Castle. She would

run to her room to get the first glimpse of the news that her Hero was sending her from the Front.

So the days sped along, and the Army had been gone about a week. According to their calculations, she knew it must be somewhere in the neighborhood of its destination, and began to look for news of a battle.

Then in the middle of the night they were all awakened by a terrible shaking and rattling of windows and casements.

"The Gnomes are coming to attack you!" wailed West Wind. "Awake! Awake!"

To the Captain of the Guards, he told this story: "I was loitering along early this evening, back near the border line when suddenly a great flight of Bats burst upon me; their number seemed countless, and on every one was a Gnome armed to the teeth." He figured they would arrive in about two days.

There was no more sleep in the Castle that night.

A hurried council was called, and ways and means for defense were discussed. Of water there was a-plenty, for a never-failing spring flowed from the fountain in the central courtyard. They had food enough to stand quite a siege, and they knew that Grey Sprite would hurry back to their rescue as soon as he should learn how they were caught.

The great question, however, was could they hold out against the assaults that the Gnomes would make? Some there were who advised that they flee the Castle at once and not risk a siege, but the Fairy Queen would not listen to such a proposition.

“Here we are, and here we remain,” said she, “I will not run away for all the Gnomes in the World.”

So as soon as daylight came, work was started on all the entrances to the Castle,

and all the doors leading out to the battlement were closed by solid masonry. Only one small opening was left for entrance, and that could be easily protected.

When they awoke the second morning after the alarm had been given, they found the plain, as far as they could see, entirely occupied by a multitude of Gnomes busily engaged in throwing up defenses and building their camp. West Wind had spoken truly when he said they were as numerous "as the sands of the sea." Everywhere the air was full of flying Bats whom the Gnomes guided by bridles, for they could not see well in the sunlight.

Their vigilance and numbers made it impossible to send out any more messengers, and the besieged could only hope that those who had been dispatched to Grey Sprite at the first alarm would get safely through to him. In the meantime, there was nothing to do but sit tight and let the forces of the Gnomes dash themselves



against the solid walls of their fortress as much as they pleased.

Presently there came a knocking at the door of the Castle, and a message was delivered for the Queen.

It contained a demand for instant and unconditional surrender and the return of the Ancient Jewel. If the demand was not complied with, the Castle would be taken by assault and no mercy shown the defenders.

The Queen's reply was a spirited refusal of all their terms and a demand that they leave her territory immediately, threatening that, unless they did so, she would destroy them all with her Army, and not a Gnome would live to see his home again.

From the great precautions the enemy seemed to be taking with their defenses, the Queen felt quite sure that they had not yet discovered the truth about the absence of her forces, and she hoped to gain some time from their preparations.

Early in the afternoon the watchers saw a large company of Gnomes make a sudden rush for the Castle, and when they had reached the foot of the walls they hastily erected rude sheds from timbers that they carried. Presently a multitude of soldiers carrying pick-axes and shovels ran across the open space and taking shelter under the sheds began to dig. With consternation the Defenders realized that there was one way of reaching them that they had overlooked, that the Gnomes intended to undermine the walls and accomplish the ruin of the great fortress.

A real panic reigned within, for there was no way to prevent this plan of their enemies from being successfully carried out, and the Queen began to regret that she had not listened to the timid ones and taken her Court to safety while there was yet time.

It was too late now, however, and they could only wring their hands and listen to

the incessant sound of the thousands of picks and shovels, as the Gnomes toiled at their accustomed labor.

Through all the discussions, one dauntless heart remained. "Grey Sprite will come," Woodbine told the Queen over and over again, but her Mistress would only shake her head in despair as she thought of the impossibility of bringing back in time an Army great enough to cope successfully with the hordes about them.

Thus passed the rest of that day, and the next morning another message from the Gnomes announced that unless by ten o'clock a flag of surrender was displayed from the Castle, it would be toppled to the ground and no mercy shown to any one.

Upon hearing this terrible news, the whole Castle was filled with screams and weeping, and many of the more timid ones demanded that the Queen immediately do what the Gnomes ordered lest by holding

out to the last minute the Queen's subjects would make the Gnomes so angry that they would not keep their promises.

Sending for Faithful Guardian, the Queen asked, "What does the Ancient Jewel tell you? Shall we yield now?" Shaking his head he said, "Trust no promise of the Gnomes, but hold out to the last."

So sending the clamoring crowd away, the Queen repaired to the room where Woodbine, since early dawn, had been sitting, watching the western horizon.

"Take heart, Your Majesty," she besought her, "he will come, I know. Had it not been for that sure knowledge, I should have died of fright when a prisoner in the heart of the Gnome Mountain, and you know how he did not fail."

The Queen smiled sadly, and gave herself up to gloomy fears.

With her and the Ancient Jewel in their possession, the Gnomes would have control of the World, and oh, the misery and



devastation that she could foresee! Giving way to despair, she wept bitterly.

"There is something coming," suddenly cried the watcher at the window. "It is coming very swiftly," she continued, as a speck that her eager eye caught in the far west began to draw rapidly nearer.

"Your Majesty, the time is nearly up. What are your commands?" the Captain of the Guards stood before her, his face so furrowed by anxiety and despair that she hardly recognized him.

"Display the flag of surrender," said she, covering her eyes with her hands.

"Wait," cried Woodbine, "just a moment, till we see what this means." For now she could make out Old Gander, as with clear trumpet calls he came hurtling through the air like an arrow from the bow.

"Oh!" cried she, "it is a Wild Goose, and there is one on his back clad in the armor of Grey Sprite and sitting beside

him a Gnome," and as her searching eye failed to see anything else appearing, "Oh, it *is* Grey Sprite! But he has come back to die with us." And throwing herself face down upon the floor, she burst into a perfect abandon of grief.

Suddenly the Captain who had taken her place at the window gave a great cry. "Come here and look!" and the tone of his voice even more than his words brought them to his side.

Grey Sprite's first thought as he sensed Old Gander's words was, "It is still standing," and then a great wave of thankfulness surged through him, as he saw the camp of the Gnomes, and knew from its appearance that the Queen and her people were still safe.

Old Gander had received his directions, and setting his mighty wings, scaled down in a great half-circle to the plain below, scattering the Bats like flies when they strove to head him off and, as he alighted,

Grey Sprite and Old Councilor sprang to the ground.

And this was what the three watchers, holding their breath, saw as they looked from the window:

One dressed in the armor of Grey Sprite and an old, grey Gnome standing beside him facing the General of their enemies with his staff drawn up behind him, while stretching out as far as the eye could see was the countless array of soldiers ready for the assault when the walls should topple and fall.

Upon the head of the one in armor was gleaming a golden crown, and pointing to it, the Old Gnome cried with a great voice, "The King is dead! Long live the King!" and then arose a mighty shout that shook even the sturdy walls of the palace.

"Hail! King of the Gnomes!"

Rushing up and flinging themselves upon their knees, the eager officers pledged their allegiance to their new

King, while above them the three looked on in wonder.

Next they saw the King hand something to one of the younger officers, who, listening respectfully for a moment, hastened towards the Castle:

“I bear a message that I must give in person to the Fairy Queen,” he cried, and presently standing in her presence, he placed in her hand the brilliant scarf that she had last seen upon the helmet of her Knight, and this is what she heard: “Grey Sprite, the King of the Gnomes, requests an audience of the Queen of the Fairies.”

Never in all the history of the Court had it been assembled so quickly. The reaction from despair to happiness had been so sudden and complete, and the burning curiosity that was consuming all was so compelling that in a very short time the Master of Ceremonies again conducted our Hero to the throne of the Queen; only





“THE KING IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE KING!”—Page 217.



this time he wore upon his head a wondrously carved crown of purest gold, and from its top gleamed the rays from a great emerald. Behind him came the Nobles of the Gnomes clad in golden armor gleaming with many jewels, and as he halted, the Master of Ceremonies cried in a voice that, try as he would, he could not keep steady, "Grey Sprite, King of the Gnomes!"

Taking the hand of the King who knelt before her, the Queen, with a wonderful smile, motioned him to a seat on the throne beside her, and Woodbine, standing behind, knew at last the meaning of the prediction which the Ancient Jewel had made, and with a sudden sinking of the heart as she gazed at the great, golden crown, wondered if the little Handmaid of the Queen would mean as much to the ruler of the Gnomes as she had to her lover, Grey Sprite, Knight of the Queen.

Later in the day when opportunity of-

ferred, and he could speak to her alone, Grey Sprite took the little Waiting Maid's hands in both of his, and in a low voice, said, "Woodbine, must I go back and marry an ugly little Gnome Girl?"

Looking up in sudden indignation, she saw the tender, quizzical look with which he was regarding her, and hiding her blushing face on his breast, murmured, "Perhaps you had better consult the Ancient Jewel."

Thus began and quickly ended the great war between the Gnomes and the Fairies.

The next night the main body of Gnomes started back on its return to Gnome-Land, but the Leaders of the Army and all the Nobles remained to join the Fairies in a great festival.

. . . . .

At the end, out on the level plain that surrounded the Castle, one beautiful afternoon, in the presence of the whole assem-



blage, there was a grand wedding. And when it was over, the Queen had suffered a loss that could never be repaired, for the most devoted Handmaid whom ever a queen had, together with the bravest and most faithful Knight, had left her service, and were going to live in Gnome-Land. The loss was softened, however, by a pact that was made at the conclusion of the ceremony. First, it was settled that never again would there be enmity between the Fairies and the Gnomes, and second, that twice every year, the Ancient Jewel would go on a journey; in one direction, it would travel from the Castle of the Fairy Queen to the Mountain of the Gnomes, and the Fairy Queen with all her Court would go with it. There would be a long visit with her devoted friends, and then when the year was half gone, it would travel back from Gnome-Land, and Grey Sprite with Woodbine together with the Nobles would safely convey it to Fairy-Land, where once

more they would dance as of old. But through it all, Faithful Guardian would be its constant attendant.

So our tale is ended. We have seen the far-reaching consequences which may follow even a humble, kindly deed, and we have verified the old proverb which says that "Bread cast upon the waters will return after many days," only in this case, it came back Wedding Cake.

THE END













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